No. 541.

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NORTH.

DEDICATED TO
MY OLD FRIEND AND FORMER
YOKE MATE IN AUSTRALIA
JIM BURKE
BY THE AUTHOR
A. G. HALES

cat

GIRLS COLLEGE
SRINAGAR

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CHAPTER I

WAS SHE SCARLET?

"WEEL, weel, A didna' ken A looked like a saftie; maybe it's ma whuskers that mak me look too simple an' gentle f'r this wicked world. I'm hopin' you'll no' deal unkindly wi' me. I'm the only son o' ma mither, an' she's a widder."

The speaker was a brawny man in the prime of life, half a head taller than most tall men; he was broad in the shoulder, deep in the chest, narrow in the flank, big of bone, and as lean as a greyhound in training. The whiskers he had referred to were long and unkempt, and each hair was like the bristle on a broom; how he could have imagined that such a beard as his could make him look soft or gentle, not even a cross-eyed Kaffir could have understood. He was leaning with his broad back against the rude rough bar of a crude saloon in a little out-of-the-way burg in South Africa, a place that had sprung up the Lord knows how, and only the Lord knows why, in a cleft between two noble but grim-looking kopjes that rose majestically from the broad bosom of the far-stretching veldt. He wore a grey homespun shirt, with turned down collar open at the neck; the sleeves were rolled up far above the elbows of a pair of arms that in colour and in cordage somehow suggested nothing so much as two sawn-off lengths of weatherstained ship's cable, rusty brown arms they were, with muscles that rippled sinuously every time he moved them. Around his rather narrow

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CHAPTER I

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A bunch of twenty or thirty men, dressed in all kinds of garbs, were seated upon the one form that ran the whole length of the saloon, hard up against the wall which the tall man faced as he stood with his back to the bar. City men, veldt farmers, diamond diggers, professional game hunters, hawkers who roamed in loose-jointed waggons from farm to farm, and from burg to burg, were in that assembly, with here and there an outcast white "schelm" whom even the Kaffirs shunned, fellows with evil faces and reputations to match. A few half-breeds hung about near the door, drivers of ox-teams or horse-teams, serving men who acted in every kind of menial capacity. Very often these fellows had been bred upon the farms owned by their masters; in many cases their coloured mothers had been slave women. Taken for all in all, the "breeds" were a bad crowd for any white man, except those who owned them, to have anything to do with.

The atmosphere of the saloon was electric with ill-suppressed anger and excitement; the only absolutely cool and unaffected personage in the assembly was the big man leaning against the bar, who was the cynosure of all eyes, a fact which he very well knew and just as plainly disregarded. Scowling faces were turned upon him whichever way he looked, but his own expression was one of tolerant good humour. The words he had uttered at the outset were manifestly a reply to some request or command made to him by the spokesman of the crowd, and, judging by the expression on the faces of all present, his answer was not considered a satisfactory one.

A pleasant-looking Boer woman, arrayed in a plain holland dress, spotlessly clean, but devoid of all ornament, who was standing behind the bar, rather nervously wiping and polishing glasses with a towel, seemed to apprehend that the answer given by her solitary customer, so far from bringing peace, was likely to stir up strife. Leaning over the bar, she touched him rather timidly upon one of his bony elbows. The man half turned towards her, lowering his glass as he did so, and smiled broadly into the comely feminine face.

" Do not anger them," she whispered. " There are some very bad men amongst them. You are only one, and they are many. Better tell them what they want to know."

The reply she received seemed to startle her considerably, for the man wheeled right round, and, leaning his elbows on the bar, he said in a guarded undertone :

" Wumman, are ye married or a widder ? A ken ye're yin or the ither by the weddin' ring on yer finger."

The look that accompanied the query was intended by the speaker to be arch, if not actually amatory, and the Boer woman giggled as she replied :

" What has that to do with the trouble ? "

" Mair maybe than you unnerstan' at the moment, f'r if y're married an' yer husband's in yon crood, it micht be as weel if ye call him tae your side o' the bar an' tie him up wi' a string."

" Me, I am a widow."

The big fellow instantly straightened himself and, lifting his hat with the air of a Spanish grandee, whilst he beamed upon his interlocutor, he said with sly humour :

" Eef y're seekin' a secon' han'le f'r yer name, how wad Mrs. Jamie McGlusky suit ye ? "

The woman's plump figure shook with suppressed laughter, and the colour crept up under the tan in her cheeks as she backed away against the shelves that held a multifarious collection of bottles and decanters.

" You are fonny," she gasped.

" Too damn funny," roared a voice from amongst the crowd on the form.

So enormous was the volume of sound in the voice of the speaker, that the low-ceiled saloon seemed scarcely able to contain it, and the bottles rattled upon the shelves. Slowly the man who had styled himself Jamie McGlusky swung round and faced the speaker.

" Eef ye air addressin' me, sirr," he purred softly, " A wad hae ye ken A'm no deaf. A wadna' hurt yer feelin's f'r all the diamonds in Africa, f'r A'm o' gentle bluid an' gentle breedin', but y've a voice like a coo an' manners tae match, an' A'm theenkin' yer mither must hae bin a wash-lady-in-waitin' tae some Delilah in Johannesburg."

The man who had been addressed in this gentle and politic fashion was something above the middle height, but so tremendously broad that he looked half a head shorter than he was, a swarthy-faced fellow, who looked like a giant compressed. Dressed like a teamster, his shirt sleeves rolled back displayed a pair of arms covered with a perfect mat of jet black hair. Clenching one fist, he brought it down with a bang on the little table in front of him, making the glasses jump and jingle.

" So you're Jamie McGlusky, are you? We've all heard about you, an' now you're goin' to hear from us. You know where the new diamond strike has been made, and you're goin' to tell us where it is, an' you're goin' to tell us now."

A savage chorus broke from the throng in the bar. As if actuated by one impulse, every man had risen from the form, and in strange animal-like attitudes they menaced the solitary prospector. The man styled McGlusky did not for a moment lose either his nerve or his self-possession.

" So," he murmured blandly, " ye hae heard o' me, hae ye? Then ye ken I'm no' a brawler, but a man whose bluid is brimmin' ower wi' the milk o' human kindness. Ye've tellt naething but the truth when ye say I ken whaur the new diamond find is located, an', bein' a lover o' the truth masel, I'll no deny it, but when ye say A'm goin' tae tell whaur it lies, ye're a leear, an' the truth is no' in ye. The mon wha' foon' it is my mate, an' he's burnin' the miles unner his horse's hoofs tae get tae the nearest warden's court tae secure the ground he's entitled to, an' reap the reward o' three years' hard labour an' hunger an' thirst, poverty, an' privation."

Suddenly all the gentleness seemed to drop from McGlusky like a mantle that has broken its moorings. He went up on his toes; the big veins in his corded neck filled and swelled; his beard seemed to bristle; a fiery glower filled his eyes, and his enormous hands doubled themselves into two massive bunches.

"A dinna ken how ye found oot the secret o' ma mate's discovery, unless ye filled ma nigger up wi' Cape brandy an' made the buckie babble. Dae ye think ye can fricht me, a pioneer, a blazer o' trails, intae betrayin' ma ain mate? By the God o' ma faithers, ye canna." He flashed his blazing glance along the row of sullen, scowling faces. "Far be it frae me tae use the hard word or say the thing that wounds, even tae such a bunch o' spunkless boneheads as yersels, but ye dinna even ken wha' matehood means, but A'll tell ye the noo. Tae a pioneer, tae a blazer o' trails, a man's mate is bone o' his bone, bluid o' his bluid, marrer o' his marrer, whilst the bond o' matehood lasts. A ken weel ye dinna realise this, or ye'd nae hae dared tae ask me tae go back on ma mate. Ye sinned in ignorance, an', seein' ye were ignorant o' yer sin, A'll forgie ye an' say naethin' in front or behind ye tae stir up bitter bluid or leave a memory that will rankle. A'll just let ye gang in britherly peace an' love, ye muck-heaps wha misca' yersels men."

This gentle outburst, combined with the appearance of McGlusky, who had taken a stride into the middle of the bar, seemed to take a great deal of the combative spirit out of the man with the bellowing voice, who had evidently imagined that the lonely prospector would have been cowed by the odds against him.

" It's all very well for you to talk about your duty to your mate," he rumbled, " but what about us? If there's a new diamond strike, and we know there is, haven't we a right to be in it ? "

" Every richt," snapped McGlusky, " providin' ye can find the location for yersels, but ye've nae richt tae try an' force information frae men who hae risked their money an' their lives tae win wealth frae the soil."

" Some of us," retorted the other fellow, " have risked as much as you and your mate have, an' we've had no luck; some of us have suffered more than you have."

" Oh, aye," almost cooed McGlusky; " A ken every dog thinks its ain fleas bite hardest," was Mac's reply to the other individual's whine.

As he eased his mind of this opinion, the prospector turned again towards the bar, and his eyes taking in the neat lines of the rather fine figure of the woman in the holland dress, his whole manner changed as if by magic, and the hard lines on his weatherbeaten face softened, and instantly the woman gave him an answering smile.

" Don't make trouble," she whispered, " and break up my poor house. This business that I have built up is all that stands between me and poverty," she sighed, " and that is a dreadful thing for a woman who has no man to work and think for her."

Off came McGlusky's broad sombrero in the grandee fashion.

" Madam is not all Dutch," he said.

"No," replied the woman; "my mother's family were French Huguenots."

For a second or two Mac stood cudgelling his brains, trying to remember a suitable phrase in his scanty stock of French. He found what he wanted after a pause, and murmured:

"A knew you were not all Dutch, because *Madame elle est si ravissante*."

The woman almost dropped her glass in her astonishment at hearing this rough-looking blade address her in the language of her mother's people.

"Monsieur speaks French," she exclaimed in delighted surprise.

"Ainly in spots," cooed McGlusky. "Just a word here an' there. A'm tellt it's a gran' language tae mak' love in, Madame."

The woman glanced at him coquettishly, making great play with her very fine eyes.

"I think," she answered archly, "Monsieur is one of those who could make love to any woman in any language. All men are alike," she added reminiscently.

McGlusky lowered one eyelid and threw an enveloping smile in the speaker's direction.

"If ye mean A cud mak' love wi' ma lips, Madame, weel, if ye'll gi' me a tryst by starlight when yer business hoors are ower, A'll dae ma puir best tae prove ye're no' a bad judge."

During this somewhat amatory conversation between the prospector and the landlady, the belligerent element in the saloon had been holding a short but heated conference, and now a very tall man of the narrowest possible proportions, who was arrayed in the shabbiest of frock coats, which assorted but ill with riding breeks and boots, advanced a pace or two in McGlusky's direction, and said in a sing-song voice:

"Mister McGlusky, sir?"

Mac, interrupted in what to him was a very much more pleasant pastime than a renewal of the debate was likely to prove, faced round.

"Weel?"

That was all he said, but there was a nasty frosty snap in the one word, which did not seem to invite a lengthy address from his interrupter.

The frock-coated man, however, was one of those personages who seem to thrive on rebuffs. Rubbing his hands together, and permitting his face to wrinkle in every direction, he smiled almost ecstatically into the belligerent face in front of him, and then broke the silence by saying:

"I am not exactly a predicant, but I scatter the good seed that the Lord has commanded us to sow whenever time and opportunity serve, Mr. McGlusky."

"Ye mean y're a local preacher? Is that it?"

The narrow-flanked man beamed again.

"You have a wonderful gift of expression, Mr. McGlusky."

"So A've been tellt. Wha' may yer business be wi me, Meester preacher?"

The other man waved his long, loose-jointed arms as though he were in truth sowing seed broadcast.

"My only desire is to cast oil upon the troubled waters, sir."

"Y're a gran' haun' at mixin' yer metaphors, wha' wi' sowin' seed an' pourin' oil, ye're giein' yersel' a four-haunded-job. Ye'll gie yersel' a bad head if ye mix yer drinks as ye mix yer metaphors. Come tae the pith o' the matter. Wha' is it ye want wi' me?"

The frock-coated personage drew from his coat-tail pocket a well-worn leather-bound Bible. Holding the book in one hand, and tapping the cover with the other, he said unctuously:

"The Book commands us to help one another."

He paused, and again his unctuous smile cracked his face into countless lines and wrinkles.

"Weel?"

There was a strident note in Mac's one expression this time, and he craned his head forward like a dog about to bite, as he waited for the explanation his expressive phrase seemed to demand. The embryo predicant wriggled all over, as if he hoped his physical motions might help what he was about to utter to permeate the consciousness of his listener.

"I think, brother," he murmured, "you would be fulfilling the Lord's commands if you gave these honest gentlemen behind me the information they are so urgently in need of."

Mac sniffed disgustedly, and, drawing a soiled and scattered 'kerchief from the pocket of his shirt, made a motion with it as though wafting away an odour that was distasteful to his nostrils.

"Seein' ye are wha' ye are," he replied gently, "A wouldna' wound ye, but it seems tae me ye are mixin' yer ain private interests wi' the message ye hae quoted frae the guid Book, an' it's ma ain experience that the man who mixes releegion wi' his business will mix knavery wi' his releegion. Turn ower the pages o' the Book ye hae in yer own hauns, an' find if ye can a passage which tells a man tae betray a trust that's been placed in him."

Finding that he was hoist with his own petard, and chagrined beyond measure to discover how easily the big prospector had turned the tables of Divine command upon him, the local preacher, who was also a sort of unchartered legal adviser to the far scattered veldt farmers, promptly abandoned the religious rôle, and fell back upon the laws of man.

"You have no right to withhold the information you possess," he shouted. "Most of them are Africkanders by birth; you are an alien and an interloper, and by law you are compelled to notify any discovery you have made in the soil of Africa for the good of the general public, and law and order must and shall be obeyed."

For a moment McGlusky stroked his beard reflectively, then, advancing one foot and shaking a big finger in the now glowering face of the orator, he said savagely :

" A kenned y'r sort as soon as ye opened y'r mooth. Ye couldna' hide the leopard's spots beneath yer sheep's wool. Dinna talk tae me aboot law an' order. Ye are body an' bone, an' wha' little brain ye possess, wi' the blackguard bunch behind ye, who are tryin' tae steal wha' belongs tae ma absent mate. Gang yer ways, ye limb o' iniquity. Law an' order is a worn-out shibboleth. Wha' the world wants an' will hae is right an' justice."

Before the embryro predicant could fashion a reply to this onslaught, the crowd surged forward. Very few, if any, of their number were believers in law of any kind, except the law which gives to those who can take and hold what they have gotten. McGlusky did not need to be told that the crisis he had all along expected was upon him, nor did he for one moment imagine that he could battle successfully against the odds opposed to him, but one thing he was sure of : do what they might to him, they should never wring the secret of his partner's discovery from his lips. In a semi-circle the ruffians had him closed in ; his back was to the bar ; in front and on both sides of him he saw nothing but savage, sweating faces, some bearded, some shorn, but all aglow with greed and untamed wrath, and the most vindictive face amidst the crew was that of the long thin man who still clutched in his claw-like fingers the leather-bound book from whose pages he had preached peace and goodwill. It was upon him that McGlusky at last focussed his gaze, and something that might have been a laugh grated through his lips.

The crowd did not come with a rush, but that they meant to come to him, McGlusky knew. He had been in too many similar scenes in his turbulent life not to fully realise the peril of the moment. Slowly and by almost imperceptible degrees the attackers inched forward. They knew that this man would not tamely submit to be manhandled, and though they had never a doubt that in the end they would overwhelm him, not one of them was individually brimming over with a desire to be the first to meet the onslaught of his hands. Not a sound now broke the stillness, except the hissing of indrawn and outgoing breath. The Kaffir half-breeds who had crowded to the doorway to watch the scene in the saloon were gaping with rolling eyes; many of them had witnessed deeds of violence in their time, but seldom had violence been perpetrated so openly. Not one of them would have lifted a finger to save the white stranger, but, with the cunning of their class, they knew that they might turn to their own profit the thing that was being done in the open light of day. The woman behind the bar was wringing her hands in terror; she knew that a thing like this could never be hushed up, and might mean the closing down of her saloon and the loss of her daily bread.

McGlusky, whose swift brain was ever quickest in moments of great emergency, was groping in his mind for some ruse, some stratagem which might enable him to win out. Suddenly he let his big arms which had been braced for action drop weakly to his sides, and with a shamefaced sort of laugh, he seemed to accept the situation and the decrees of Fate.

" A canna' fecht a score o' ye," he growled, " but eef A had ye yin by yin ootside on the open veldt, A'd beat the grace o' God intae ye, but A've done ma best for ma mate, an' nae man can dae mair than his best. Will ye gie me yer words that ye'll let me haud on tae ma ain claim, if A tell ye whaur the diamon's hae been found?"

As he spoke, all the lion seemed to fade out of him; his very figure wilted. To the woman watching him, he seemed a pitiful, cringing, abject thing, greedy only for his own personal gain, and her full, rich red lips that had smiled upon him so freely only a few minutes before, now curled with contemptuous disdain; she being a woman, would have hated to have seen him attempt to battle with his naked hands against such hopeless odds; being a woman, and a bonny one, it would have cut her to the heart to have seen him beaten and smashed with pistol butts into hopeless insensibility or worse, and she knew her customers, but to watch him, a magnificent giant of a man, cringing like a whipped dog before his assailants, without striking a blow, after all his brave talk, made her despise herself for having taken him even for so short a time into the inner recesses of her woman's feelings, for McGlusky had impressed her, and she knew it.

"*Ach*," she muttered, and threw her towel from her in a motion of anger and disgust. "*Verdommte Schelm*, he was all words and wind."

McGlusky heard her, and, screwing his face in her direction, looked at her like some coward appealing for pity, and the woman turned her head aside and spat on the floor. The crowd of veldt ruffians grinned broadly; McGlusky read every grin aright, and seemed to cringe into his boots. If ever a man looked a beaten braggart, a badly pricked bubble, he did in that instant; even the Kaffir half-breeds in the doorway made inexpressible motions of contempt in his direction.

"A'm no' a cooard," whimpered Mac, "but ye'll admit A had nae a dog's chance againt the bunch o' ye. Noo let's drink tae frien'ship an' guid will, an' then A'll tell ye mair even than ye want tae know."

Swiftly unbuttoning one of the pockets in his leather belt, he produced three or four uncut diamonds of more than average size; holding them in the palm of his left hand towards the embryo predicant, he exclaimed in a whimpering voice, and with a crawling sort of smile that would have disgusted any manly man's manliness:

"Look for yer ainsel, an' see that A'm no' a leer. I took these frae the groun' at the new find ma ainsel."

Every head was instantly craned towards his open palm, and inarticulate cries and ejaculations broke out on all sides. Hands were stretched out like vulture talons, to finger the gems. Suddenly McGlusky clenched the hand that held the stones, and drawing back his arm exclaimed almost piteously:

"Haud on, haud on; ye hae no' yet gi'en me yer solemn promise that ye'll protect me in ma rights in ma ain claim."

A hoarse shout arose from the throng, as with one voice they roared the promise to him which not one of them meant to keep.

"Weel, weel," sighed McGlusky. "Min', A'll haud ye to that promise wi' all the powers o' law an' order." Then, facing the woman he cried: "A call ye tae witness the promise. Ye're a wumman o' substance an' standin' in the community; ye'll bear me witness?"

With a look that McGlusky afterwards said made him feel sick in his wame, the woman made a contemptuous gesture, and walked to the other end of the bar.

Again Mac held the diamonds out, and the would-be predicant-cum-legal luminary stretched his long neck forward to scrutinize them closely, and in that moment Mac's right hand, that in its time had torn barbed wire asunder like strands of withered grass, closed on his beard. There was a sudden backward jerk of terrific force, and Mac at a later date, describing that moment to his pardner, said: "A dinna ken whether the buckie's neck grew twa inches when A gied him that jerk, but it was nae ma fault if it deidna'. Eef his neck didna grow, his shirt collar shrank, for A saw his blade bones come up tae his ears." The next instant, still holding his victim by the whiskers, Mac launched himself forward, hurling himself through the breach and taking the predicant with him. Then his voice rang out like a lion's roar.

"Ye spawn o' sin. Rob ma mate, wad ye? Ye were askin' f'r law—A'll gie ye the unwritten law o' the wilds."

Suddenly wrenching the predicant's head right forward, he drove his own bony skull into the fellow's solar plexus, doubling him up like a bent banana skin; the next instant both his hands closed upon the man's hips, then he heaved upwards with his mighty arms, at the same moment tossing his head like a bull bison, and the predicant went hurtling over the bar, and landed amongst the bottles and decanters on the shelves. It was a mighty heave and a mighty throw, and McGlusky, exulting in his leonine strength, pranced for a moment before the gaping crowd.

"A ken A'm nae the mon that yince A was," he stormed, "A'm but a broken bough, a withered leaf, but A'm still Jamie McGlusky, the trail blazer. Gin yon mon ever crosses ma trail again, A'll push him intae a bottle an' tie the cork doon wi' his whiskers. Noo follow me wha daur."

He wheeled towards the door and charged like a storm, and the Kaffir half-breeds melted before his rush like a flock of quail before a falcon's swoop. There were a dozen saddle horses standing before the Boer stoep. With three long strides and a bound McGlusky reached the nearest one; wrenching the reins from the hitching-rail, he thrust one foot into the stirrup and made a spring for the saddle, but in that moment his gods forsook him. The girths had been loosed, and under the pressure of the prospector's weight the faithless saddle swung round under the horse's belly, and McGlusky, his foot still tangled in the stirrup, came down on the broad of his back. He struggled to his knees, but in that moment his foes, recovering from the surprise he had put upon them, poured over the stoep and fell upon him like wolves on an enmeshed lion. Grimly he struggled and fought whilst pistol butts and Kaffir knob-kerries rained down upon him. His foot had slipped right through the stirrup, and when he did struggle on to one leg the plunging horse jerked him down again, and at last they got him face downward in the dirt, nor did they let him rise until his hands in raw-hide bonds were bound behind his back, and then, with whoop and yell and jibe, they flogged him with their sjamboks into the saloon again, where the woman in her white holland dress still stood behind the bar. Then they searched his pouch for the three diamonds he had displayed, and found them, whilst McGlusky, battered and bleeding, stood grimly silent. Jubilation ran riot amongst the veldt rowdies; drinks were called for, and with mockery and jibe McGlusky's health was drunk, and when the glasses were emptied again they demanded of him the information he had so stubbornly refused to give. It was the would-be predicant who, writhing in anguish at every movement he made, approached McGlusky. The fellow had divested himself of every semblance of either law or religion. Taking hold of McGlusky's beard with both hands, and tugging venomously, he screamed almost like a Bedlanitish woman:

"Tell us where the new diamond field is, or we'll sjambok the flesh from your bones."

Instantly the crowd pressed in on the bound man, every hand waving a sjambok, that dreaded weapon of the veldt. McGlusky's head went up, his big mobile lips curled with unutterable scorn.

"A'll nae answer y'r threats," he growled. "It's no ma way tae bark when A canna bite, but, losh eef A ever meet ye mon tae mon, A'll push yer heels intae yer ain ears, an' pu' 'em oot through yer eyes."

Then the sjamboks fell upon him like winter's rain upon a shingle roof, but they wrung no cry from him. At last there came a lull in the storm, and the assailants stood panting, and in that moment a woman's voice, shrill and high-pitched, rang through the saloon.

"Han's up, or I shoot—queeck."

The veldt wolves turned their eyes towards the bar, and saw the white-frocked woman with a Mauser carbine resting against her shoulder, the blue-black muzzle pointing with deadly steadiness right into their midst. Everyone present, except McGlusky, knew her reputation as a game shot, for her husband had been a hunter, and she had always travelled with him, and more than one lion had fallen to her gun. Every hand went up and went up quickly. Then the rifle barrel flickered just a little, until it seemed to point between the eyes of the embryo predicant.

"Lift the flap of the bar and open the door, and push your prisoner through to me."

For an instant the man shifted his gaze from the rifle barrel to the woman's eyes, but found no comfort in what he saw, and with remarkable agility he obeyed her commands. Bruised, bleeding, tattered and torn as he was, McGlusky, with his hands bound behind him, strode through the narrow path that had been made for him with the old reckless swagger that had marked him through life, and looking into the woman's face, he drawled :

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" Iphm, A'm no theenkin' the name o' Mrs. Jamie McGlusky wad sit sae ill on ye, wumman. Ye're a hen after ma ain heart."

But the hen in question had her attention concentrated too firmly on the wolf-pack in front of her to heed the prisoner's reckless utterance.

" You will go out of my saloon one by one with your hands in the air. I shoot if one look round an' drop his hand. Go queeck—this gun has a hair trigger."

The predicant was the first man out of the door, and not a solitary soul amongst them loitered to say farewell. As the last man passed through the doorway she slipped from behind the bar, still carrying her carbine in her capable hands ; then she closed the strong door, shot the bolts and dropped the bars in place. Then she went back to McGlusky.

" Quick, wumman," he growled hoarsely, " cut ma hands free an' gie me yer carbine, an' A'll leave somethin' tae feed the vultures on the veldt."

She shook her head and whispered :

" No, no, that makes the troubles come thick and fast for you and me later."

She smiled into his eyes as she spoke and then, to his unutterable amazement, she rose on the tips of her toes and kissed him flush upon the mouth, whilst into McGlusky's eyes leapt the flame that all women know, and some love and some dread. The next moment she had flitted into the back apartments, and he could hear her bolting and barring the doors. When this was done, she came back and freed him from his bonds. It was then that McGlusky forgot all that he owed the woman, and remembered only the shame and the humiliation of the sjamboking he had received. Snatching her carbine from the table, he vaulted over the bar, tore open the front door and strode out on to the stoep, only to see his opponents well away in the distance. Lifting the carbine to his shoulder, and sighting the nearest horseman, he touched the trigger, but only a lifeless click responded to his effort at vengeance, but the men in the distance had sighted him, and his presence on the stoep, carbine in hand, seemed to offer them no inducement to stay in the vicinity. A low laugh behind him made McGlusky turn, and he glowered into the face of the woman in white. She nodded in reply to his interrogative stare.

"Yees, oh yees, I emptied the carbine before I untied your hands. If you keel one, two, three, what then? The others ride to the nearest burgh and say you haf been murder them. Then the burghers come in a commando an' you hang from my tree in the yard. What for you mak' yourself silly like that, eh?"

Slowly McGlusky's battered visage relaxed into a smile.

"Yer heid," he said condescendingly, "is mair than a hatrack. Noo A'm theenkin' A've mair than earned a drink."

As they entered the room the woman barred and bolted the door once more, then with rueful countenance she surveyed the damage that had been done when McGlusky had given the local preacher person his bull-like hoist.

"Dinna fash," said McGlusky, edging close to her. "The deil's buckies got awa' wi' ma three diamonds, but there's plenty mair whaur they came from, an' A'll pay ye weel for a' ye've lost."

He sidled still closer; then his left arm stole round her waist, and his right thumb and forefinger took possession of her chin, uptilting her face.

"There's something mair A owe ye, ma lily o' the veldt."

The woman lifted her eyebrows, as if surprised.

"What else you owe me?" she queried, with a sweet quirk at the corner of her lips, and a twinkle that might easily have been mistaken for encouragement in her fine eyes.

" Wha' mair ? Why, A owe ye the kiss ye lent me when ma hands were tied, an' A'll pay ma debt as the Guid Book commands us tae, wi' guid measure heaped up and brimmin' over——" and he did.

So fully did he pay that the woman was half-strangled by his whiskers, and with her hands pressed against his chest struggled laughingly from his embrace,exclaiming:

" Oh, oh, Meester McGlusky, which you do hardest, fight—or make love ? "

" Dinna ca' me Meester," cooed McGlusky, the amorous side of his nature now in excelsis. " Ca' ma Jamie, y'r ain pet lamb."

" Oh, Jeemie."

What else she might have added was drowned in his whiskers, for again he had taken her in his arms, and so fiercely did he clasp that she hadn't even breath to protest.

Whilst McGlusky was washing the signs of the fray from himself, the woman in white cooked him an ample meal of venison and fried eggs, and together they enjoyed it. Every now and again during the repast, McGlusky would lay down his knife and fork and exclaim :

" The mair A look at ye, the mair A theenk Mrs. Jamie McGlusky's the name that'll suit ye better than any ither," and the good-looking face at the other end of the table, rosy red with blushes, beamed back upon him, and ever and anon a kiss would be wafted in his direction by plump but shapely fingers.

After the meal they sat out on the stoep, Boer fashion, and watched the stars come out, but Mac had a carbine by his side, which he had seen to it this time was loaded. On the little table in front of them was a small bottle and glass, and the woman manipulated the bottle, though she never touched the liquor.

"Eet ees not Boer dop," she whispered, "but best French cognac."

As the time wore on, she drew closer and closer, and Mac's arm clasps grew tighter and tighter—he was Scotch ye ken.

"There may be a better heaven than this," he murmured a bit thickly, "but A'm theenkin' it wull be hard tae find."

"Oh, Jeemie," was her only reply, as her cheek dropped against his. Then she began to coo to him about the claim he and his mate had found. Was it really as rich as the pack of veldt wolves had heard it was? Was it far away, and did it lie east or west? And the good French cognac and the woman's blandishments did the rest.

Suddenly Mac laid his right arm upon the table, and rested his brow upon it, and the music that came from amidst his whiskers was like the droning of the bag-pipes after a lost battle. Then the woman, leaning over with a sweet little smile on her red lips, kissed him on his bare neck, and tip-toed away into the inner silences.

The sun was well up in the heavens the next morning before McGlusky, who was usually astir before the dawn, lifted his heavy head from the little table on the stoep, and even as he lifted it, he clapped both palms to his brow.

"Ma certie," he muttered, "eef A had a horse inside ma head, an' it was kickin' ma' brains oot, it couldna' ache worse." Then his eyes fell on the half-empty bottle. "A hair oot o' the dog that bit ye is what ye're wantin', Mac," he muttered, and then poured himself out a stiff glass, but as he raised it to his lips, something in its aroma caused him to shudder and put the glass down. "A'm no likin' the smell o' it the morn," he mused. "It seems tae mak' me squirm in the innards." Leaning back in his chair, he dug from the cells of memory all the events of the preceding afternoon and night. "A can unnerstan' the men an' the fecht, but the deil run awa' wi' me if A can unnderstan' the woman in white. She was here by me side the last thing A remember. A'm theenkin' A must hae made a beast o' masel wi' the bottle. A'll gang an' hae a word wi' her ; she must be up an' aboot long ere this."

He moved along the stoep towards the door, but the pain in his brain made him reel, and he paused more than once in his short journey to clasp his head with both hands. He found the door locked from the inside, barred and bolted too, he judged, when he put his shoulder against it.

"This seems a wee bittie queer," he growled, and he cast his eye back towards the table on the stoep. "She's ta'en the carbine too. Eef ma frien's o' yesterday had returned, they wad hae ta'en me in their toils. F'r a wumman who was sae willin' tae be Mrs. Jamie McGlusky, it is no' what I would hae expectit o' her. Weel, weel, the ways o' a mon wi' a maid may puzzle a prophet, but the ways o' a widder wi' a mon wad puzzle the deil. P'raps that's because they've had some."

Bracing himself against the throbbing agony in his head, he strode round to the back of the premises, only to find every door locked. An upward glance at the chimney told him there were no fires alight in the place.

"Dom strange," he muttered. "Neither the widder nor a Kaffir astir."

He rapped sharply at the door, then put his ear to the keyhole. No sound but the echo of his own knocking reached him. Clenching his fist, he struck the door several resounding blows, then waited and listened. Only echoes answered him, and the sweat of anxiety broke out on his throbbing brow. Turning his back to the door, and putting both hands to his mouth, he made the echoes ring with a resounding "Coo-ee," but no answer came from the stables or the small Kaffir kraal nearby. With an expression of unutterable bewilderment on his face, he sat down on the door-step, but only for a few short seconds. Then, rising, he strode to the stables, only to find them empty; not only were the widow's horses and Cape cart gone, but his own horse also. A swift search in the Kaffir kraal convinced him that he was the only living personage about the place. Striding to the water barrel, and stripping to the waist, he plunged his head and fore-quarters into the rain water again and again, then rubbed himself down with his shirt. All kinds of fancies were flashing through his brain as he did so, and none of them were complimentary to the widow. Picking up a large-sized log as though it were a splinter, and using it as a battering-ram, he charged at the back door and burst the lock open. In thirty seconds he knew the worst. The widow had cajoled his secret and his mate's secret out of him, and had disappeared into the night, whilst he lay in a drugged stupor.

"A'weel," he snarled, "it tak's a wumman tae crucify a mon on the cross o' his own vanity. Jamie McGlusky, ye're a saftie."

Having delivered judgment upon himself, he wasted no more time on self-recrimination. Stripping off his breeks, he hacked away the legs with a table knife, until he had converted his riding trousers into a pair of shorts. "A've tae travel far an' travel fast," he growled, "and must travel light." Filling a canvas water-bag with about a gallon of rain water, and making up a small wallet of food which he strapped across his naked shoulder like a bandolier, he strode forth, carrying the water-bag in one hand and a stout knobkerry in the other. He was dressed in nothing now but soft slouch hat, his improvised shorts and a pair of veldt-schoon. Pausing a second or two to take his bearings, McGlusky the trail blazer strode out across the pathless veldt. For nearly an hour he walked with the long space-devouring strides of the practised pioneer. Then, pausing to readjust his supplies upon his person, he snarled :

" Noo A've walked off some o' the pain in ma brain, an' A'll just buckle tae it an' run, as the Zulu hunters taught me tae run. A'm theenkin' the widder will hae got too guid a start o' me in her Cape cart, an' will hae a big body o' her friends mounted an' armed on the way tae oor claim by this time."

He sat down, and though the very sight of food nauseated him after his drugging of the night before, he forced food inside himself, and as he did so, he growled :

" A man's a puir saftie. Ten men couldna' pull him against his will, but a wumman will draw him through a keyhole wi' a hair o' her head an' a glint o' her eye. But, by the whuskers o' Mahomet, gin A rin intae the bucky wha' stole ma three diamon's, A'll kick him sae high he'll bounce himsel' tae death when he comes doon."

By this time he was ready. For a quarter of a mile he walked, then he broke into the long striding lope of the Zulus, which in the course of a day will tire a horse down. He ran until even his triple-steel muscles refused their office, then he flung himself down on the veldt grass, drank sparingly of his rain water and, finding that he could eat, ate ravenously, then stretched himself out and slept. " Twa hours," he had muttered when he closed his eyes, and in two hours' time to the very tick, he was on his feet again.

For two days and two nights he kept on his untiring way, sleeping and eating little, but enough to keep his energies unimpaired. On the morning of the third day he toiled wearily up a rocky hillside, and when he had reached its crest, looked down into what must have been the crater of an extinct volcano. When he had left it a week before, he had left no living thing behind him, for this was where he and his mate had located the diamonds; now saddle hacks were cropping the coarse herbage in all directions round the edges of the crater, and at the bottom, where the diamonds lay, some fifty or sixty bearded Boer burghers were busily pegging claims, their short, useful carbines slung handily across their shoulders, and in their midst was the woman in white, directing their energies.

"Not a dom bit o' ground left f'r me or ma mate," muttered McGlusky, "an' weel A ken burgher's law will be backed by burghers' bullets."

He sat down with his chin resting on his hunched-up knees, and it was the woman in white he watched.

"Me an' ma mate," he murmured, "blazed this trail, an' I hae pairted wi' the wealth o' kings. A'weel, A'll nae squeal. Adam were a dom mean skunk, an' said when his folly foon' him oot: 'The wumman tempted ma, an' A did eat,' but Jamie McGlusky, the wumman in white ainly did half the temptin'; y'r ain unholy cravin' f'r forbidden fruit did the rest, an' A'm hopin' y're likin' the meal ye've made. Yè've paid a princely price for it." He straightened himself up. "Noo," he muttered, "A'll hike back an' meet ma mate. If he doesna mak' ma eat dirt, he's too guid f'r this wicked world, an' is fit f'r a harp an' a halo."

CHAPTER II

MCGLUSKY'S NOBILITY OF SOUL

AFTER surveying the burghers busily pegging out every inch of the mining ground which he and his mate had discovered, McGlusky, with a bitter twist to his lips and a black frown knitting his brows, strode off to a spot on the side of the volcano crater where lay the little cave which had been home to his mate and himself during the time when they had been laboriously prospecting every inch of the adjacent country for diamonds. It had been a wild beast's lair when the pair of treasure-seekers had discovered it, its original inhabitants being a lioness and two cubs; Mac had shot the lioness and his mate had accounted for her offspring, and then, finding that the cave had been well chosen for a hiding-place, they had cleaned it out and turned it into a prospector's camp. After they had made their great discovery, they had cached their rifles, ammunition, blankets, and so forth, with all the skill of old-timers, because they had argued that it would not be wise for McGlusky to hang about in the vicinity of their wonderful diamond find, whilst his partner was away, seeking to secure the ground according to mining law. They were both awake to the fact that if any stray party of Boers should happen to come along that way and discover McGlusky's presence, their suspicions would be aroused, and they would most certainly seek to find out the object of his residence in such an unpromising tract of country, and if they searched the volcanic crater, as they were almost sure to do, nothing could prevent them from discovering the numerous pot-holes which the two prospectors had sunk when testing the ground, and once on the scent they were almost certain to gather some inkling of the discovery the two adventurers had made, and in that case the fat would be in the fire, for they would peg out claims for themselves on the off chance, and burgher law would most assuredly uphold any claim that they might make to the ground. It was in order to minimise the chances of such a contretemps that McGlusky had moved away from the locality of the find, whilst his mate went further afield to secure the legal right to the ground they had prospected. If McGlusky had been content to camp out in the wilds with his Kaffir boy, whilst his partner had gone upon his errand, all might have been well, but blundering by chance on the little back-block hostelry, the temptation to have just one drink had been too strong for Mac, and the one drink had led to a good many others, and whilst he was enjoying himself, his Kaffir lad must have done some talking, which led to the trouble which has previously been portrayed. Deep down in his soul, Jamie McGlusky was a fatalist. He was not the sort to sit down and whine because his own folly had caused him to throw away a fortune. After he had opened his *cache*, he carefully selected all that he considered worth carrying away, and, having placed the lot in between his mate's and his own blankets, he rolled the whole outfit into one huge "swag," and strapped it all together. His own bandolier, well stocked with shells, he had slung across his bare shoulders, then hoisting the heart-breaking "swag" on to his back, and taking his rifle in his right hand, he strode out of the cave. For a minute or two he looked down into the funnel-like crater where the Boers who had outwitted him were as busy as a hive of bees, staking out their claims, and in those moments the bitterness of his soul welled outward to his lips, and more than once the big right hand that held his rifle twitched ominously.

"Ye blasties," he growled, "A've half a mind tae drop ma pack an' send ye a Chreestian's greetin' frae the muzzle o' ma gun, but A ken A canna get ye all before some o' ye wad get me, an' then when ma mate cam' ridin' in, ye'd get him." He stood leaning on his rifle, glowering down at the busy and unsuspecting throng. "A'weel," he murmured at last with a big sigh, "A've robbed ma mate o' his wealth through ma ain dom fuleishness. A've na right tae rob him o' his life just f'r the pleasure o' sendin' a few skunks tae Tophet." He spat savagely at an adjacent rock, and then combing his whiskers with the fingers of his free hand, he murmured: "A think A'll just say a wee bit prayer tae soothe ma ain feelin's, an' prove A'm a Chreestian mon an' no' a heathen." Pulling his battered hat from his unkempt head, he dropped his chin upon his broad chest and prayed according to the creed of McGlusky. "Lord, ye ken A'm a sinfu' mon. A'm no a fule, exceptin' when ma belly an' ma brains are ower wet wi' whuskey. Even then, O Lord, ye ken A'm no mon's fule, unless there's a petticoat waggin' between me an' ma responseebilities. Weel A ken, O Lord, that when the deil marches intae war, it's a petticoat he has f'r his banner, flauntin' in the breezes. A'm no repinin', A'm no ragin' as the heathen rage; A'm askin' a favour as a Chreestian mon. Let the deil tak' the wumman who played wi' ma heart-strings like a fiddler on his fiddle, but gie intae ma hands in Thine own guid time the bunch o' sawneys wha ca' themsel's men who led yon army o' claim-jumpers tae the ground that was mine an' ma mate's; A'll no be vengefu' wi' them, but if A dinna button their ears tae their breeks instead o' braces, an' mak' 'em crawl upon their hands an' knees at ma heels like a team o' dogs, ye may write me doon a sawney in the book o' life—Amen."

Shouldering his pack again, he strode off purposefully without so much as a backward glance in the direction of the spot where his lost treasure lay. When he and his mate had parted, they had made a rendezvous at a little spring which lay at the foot of a small kopje some thirty miles away from the scene of the diamond find. Mac, who was born with a compass in his head, such as the wild birds and beasts carry, only needed to sweep the country with one long keen gaze, and he had his bearings complete. He was a born bushman and plainsman, and could steer a course as unerringly as any vulture. The thought that he might go astray never entered his head, nor was his confidence in himself misplaced. With characteristic forcefulness of will, he had tossed all his recent troubles behind him, muttering as he did so:

" Losh, A've spilled the milk ; it's nae use dabblin' ma feet in it. What is done belongs tae the past ; what is tae be done is i' the belly o' the future ; tomorrow is no mon's dey. A ken those blighters back i' the crater wull hae many a grin at ma expense, an' richt weel A deserve it ; they'll jeer at the name o' Jamie McGlusky the saftie who threw awa' a fortune that wad ransom ten kings an' buy a princess. A'weel, let the blasties jeer—it's their Sunday oot f'r laughin'. It'll dae me nae guid to repine, f'r richt weel A ken tha' the mon who stops tae throw a stane at every cur dog that yaps at his heels on the highway o' life never gaes ower far nor climbs verra high. Ye've got tae bite on the bullet, Jamie, an' no f'r the first time i' y'r sinfu' life. The wheel o' a mon's world is always turnin' an' just noo ye're hangin' tae the bottom spoke, Jamie McGlusky, an' y'r nose is bumpin' the dirt, an' A'm hopin' ye like it, but if ye haud tight tae the wheel, it will carry ye tae the top again, gin ye hae got guts."

Solacing himself with this soliloquy, he lifted his leonine head high, and let his long legs swing rhythmically, until he knew that he was devouring the miles as few unladen men could have done, and the huge pack upon his shoulders troubled him not at all. It was not until the sun was riding right above his head in the heavens, denoting the noonday hour, that he checked himself. Carefully he laid his rifle in the grass, then, unbuckling the straps which held his swag in place, he let the pack slide gently to the ground, and after stretching his limbs and body, he shook his great frame as a horse does when saddle and bridle are slipped from its carcass. Searching around on the veldt, he soon found sufficient sun-baked chips of animal manure with which to build him a fire enough to cook himself a frugal meal and boil for himself a billy-can of tea. There was no timber near his resting-place, and no water, but he had carried in his left hand all the way from his cave a gallon of the precious fluid in a canvas water-bag. When his meal was cooked and eaten and well washed down with copious draughts of the strong tea he had brewed, he felt more content with himself and the world in general. Pulling off his veldt-schoon in order to let sun and wind exert their healing properties upon his pedal extremities, he stretched himself out upon the hard earth and, using his swag as a pillow, he smoked the pipe of peace and contentment, for Jamie McGlusky was a philosopher, never so much a philosopher as when the sharp edge of the axe of destiny was turned in his direction. As he smoked, he reflected :

" It's dom strange—puff—the sweetest thing on earth is a wumman, an' the longin' f'r them bites intae a strong mon's flesh when he's at his strongest—puff. Strange that when a mon's strongest in every ither respec', he's at his weakest i' the hands o' a wumman—puff—A'm theenkin' that's the law o' equalisation wi' which the han' that turns the world keeps the balance level between mon an' wumman. We're a' brutes, we men ; the best o' us is nae better than a bull, an' wumman would na hae a chance i' the battle o' life eef oor strength wasna oor weakness. It's then that they fule us an' bin' us han' an' foot wi' a silken thread o' their hair. A used tae think Samson was a saftie when he let Delilah twiddle him roond her fingers an' thumbs like a shoestring. Delilah was sweet an' winsom, nae doot, though A've nae seen a portrait o' the lady, an' sae was the white-frocked wumman who made a fule o' me in the back-block boozin' ken in the kloof. A'weel, eef A didn'a get the substance, A got the shadow, and A can dream o' her bright eyes an' her red mooth. She canna rob me o' that, anyhow."

Knocking the ashes out of his pipe, he screwed one weather-beaten cheek down cosily into his impromptu pillow, and bending his indomitable will to the purpose of compelling sleep, he was soon in the land of dreams and as he slept, he heralded the fact by the trumpet tones that emerged from his big, hooked nose. A single aasvogel, a vulture of the African wilds, passing high over him in the sky, so high that it looked little more than a speck in the blue, sighted or scented him, or sensed his presence by the inexplicable force which guides and governs those winged devils of the wilds. Dropping like a plumet from the fathomless heights of the vaulted blue, the bird of prey came down to within a few yards of the slumbering trail-blazer, then it swept round and round him in many circles, until at length it came to grass with its scrawny neck up-reached, its serpentine head and great curved beak pointing in his direction. Soon other aasvogels came trailing from all parts of the compass high o'erhead. Whence they had come, how they had known that their leader had made a discovery and swooped earthwards, belongs to the mysteries that remain the secrets of the barren places of the world. No speck had been in the skies when McGlusky had cast his last look upward before seeking his slumber, yet when he awoke he was ringed round with a guard of evil-looking feathered sentinels, whose beady eyes were fixed upon him unwinkingly. He awoke, as all backwoodsmen awake, with every faculty instantly alert ; his eyelids lifted, and he saw the sentinel circle some thirty yards away and around him. An expression of unutterable disgust swept over his cast-iron features, for he knew the meaning of this unwelcome visit, knew that the aasvogels picked out prospectors, hunters or lone, lost travellers, and watched to see if famine or thirst caused them to lie down with the weakness that knows no uplifting. He knew that if the death weakness were upon him, the foul, evil-smelling, mangy bird beasts would come hopping in upon him in their grotesque movements before the breath was out of his body, to strike at the quivering flesh of face and throat and neck, to tear the sightless eyes from their sockets, and to make a charnel-house of what had been a man.

" Ye dom claim-jumpers, ye blasted feathered kinsfolk o' human bogus company promoters."

The almost soundless words slipped past McGlusky's lips ; one of his hands moved stealthily, inch by inch, towards the rifle that when he slept lay ever ready at his side for his use. Suddenly he rose to a sitting posture, and as he did so every aasvogel rose also ; instinct told them that this man was not yet ready for his obsequies.

" Bury me, wad ye ? Jamie McGlusky's nae gaein' tae heaven through the gizzard or guts o' a vulture. A'm goin' tae fly high when A die, but no in the belly o' a bird beastie."

His rifle was at his shoulder, and swiftly though the aasvogels whirled upward and away, they did not travel as fast as his bullets. Three times his rifle cracked, and three misshapen things came tumbling from the blue to the sun-baked soil.

"Three," he growled, rising to his feet. "A'm no vengefu', but A'm wishin' ye belonged tae the blasties who doodled me an' ma mate oot o' oor hard earned spoils, ye feathered scum. Ye were nae use livin' an' less use noo ye're dead, for even a hyena wouldn'a mak' a meal off ye."

With the inherent care of men of his kind, he broke his rifle, cleaned the barrel, refilled the ammunition clip, then shouldering his swag, he made his way towards the rendezvous. Passing one of the fallen vultures he noticed that it still retained a spark of life. Letting his rifle barrel glide swiftly through his hand, he let the butt crash heavily on the bird's bony skull, crushing it to pulp.

"The Lord kens," he muttered. "A'm no o' a vengefu' speerit, but just a lover o' justice an' a fair deal a' round." Then, rolling his eyes skywards, he added: "Maybe, O Lord, in Thy guid time an' place ye'll gie Thy hum'le servant a chance tae come tae grups wi' those humans who hae shorn me an' left me as naked tae the world wi'out gold or gear, as a bald-faced sheep."

He did not find his mate at the place appointed, but that did not perturb him. His own previous experience made him wise to the fact that vexatious delays often occurred when prospectors arrived at mining centres to make good their claims to new ground. He made himself a camp by the little spring, and prepared to take life easily until his comrade should put in an appearance. For forty-eight hours he was content to remain idle, and then the itch of unrest took possession of his unquiet soul. Leaving his pack in camp as a sign to his mate that he was at the rendezvous, should that worthy arrive during his absence, he loafed out on to the veldt, his bandolier across his shoulders, his rifle in his hands. For some time he saw nothing in the shape of game worth shooting, and coming to a dry sluit, he clambered down its banks, and having nothing better to do, he marched at haphazard along the sluit, which at that time of the year was bone dry, though in the rainy season it would be a rushing torrent. Every now and again as he walked, the prospecting instinct awoke in him, and he would pause, lay his rifle down, pull his long knife from his belt, and dig up a handful or two of clay or hard beaten sand, and examine it carefully by "dry-blowing" for traces of gold. On one such occasion he remarked, as though speaking to a companion:

"A see nae signs o' gold hereaboot, but it's just whaur ye least expec' tae fin' it that ye run intae the precious metal. It's one dom sure thing if ye dinna dig, ye'll never find. Gold doesn't get up an' bark at ye, even if ye tread on it."

After a few hours of this haphazard work, he seated himself on a large sized rock, and having cut himself a pipe of tobacco from a square plug, he rubbed it between his horny palms to make it draw easily in his pipe. As he did so, he began to talk, for Jamie McGlusky was a spiritualist—not one of the table-rapping, piano-shifting, monkey-trick species, but a practical spiritualist. He did not believe that men died and went to heaven or to hell. He knew that bodies went into the earth and rotted, because he had helped to send a few humans to that destined end during his peaceful sojourn on this planet. It was his firm and unshakable belief that the spirit of each individual man had begun at the very beginning of things, and had inhabited many human frames during the course of the ages. He had delved very deeply into this subject, and did not believe that when his time came to go west his freed spirit would be very much different in its disembodied state to what it was when in its present earthly tenement. He felt pretty certain that, as like attracts like, his freed spirit, after so-called death, would immediately get into touch with kindred spirits beyond the veil, and be not a great deal better nor a great deal worse than when it was controlling the carcass of Jamie McGlusky. The idea that he would become a sort of superman with wonderful wisdom as soon as he had shaken off his present earthly body, never entered his practical mind. That he had ever been a tapeworm, and had worked his way up from reptile to animal, and from animal to human, as outlined in the Darwinian theory which he had read and studied, was a thing he scoffed at, and he held that Darwin was a man who had grown drunken on dreams. To him it seemed only the natural course of events that when death came to the body, the spirit reft of an earthly tenement went about its business very much as it had done when on earth, and whilst on probation in the spirit realms it could be and was attracted to the things and people on earth that harmonised with it, and he was quite sure in his own mind that quite a number of people who had passed into the beyond came back to him at various times, and sojourned with him, and they were as real to him as the flesh and blood people with whom he came in contact. So, sitting on the rocky boulder, rubbing tobacco between his palms in an African sluit, he did not feel the least bit lonely, for he was absolutely certain some of his old-time friends, and some, too, whom he had never known in his present life, were close around him, and it was to them he addressed the remarks that at times fell from his lips, and as he felt in need of a little advice at that juncture, he had no scruples about asking for it, he would have asked for a new pair of trousers if in need of them. Having set his pipe going, he closed his eyes, and then remarked :

" A'm no' wantin' tae discuss high philosophy or releegion, or any o' the abstruse sciences at the moment. Wha' A'm needin' is a wee bittie o' common sense advice. Are ye there, Paddy Doolan ? Ye were a dom guid prospector when ye were sober enough tae ken the deefference between a quartz reef an' a quart pot, an' a guid mate, drunk or sober. A'm theenkin' A can feel your influence near me the noo, though ye've been dead an' buried these ten years, for A'm feelin' mighty dry i' ma throat, an' A'd gie a grup o' ma hand tae any pilgrim who might happen along the noo wi' a spare bottle o' whuskey in his saddle pack. Eef there's any gold in these pairts, Paddy, lead me tae it like a leetle child, an' A'll nae forget tae drink your health in a bottle o' the best eef A mak' a strike o' the yellow metal. Ma certie, A'm theenkin' it's goin' tae go michty hard wi' Jamie McGlusky an' his mate eef we dinna strike somethin' pretty soon."

Having made his modest request, Mac knocked the dottle out of his pipe and ambled off along the sluit, pausing every quarter of a mile or so to sample the ground, but as far as gold was concerned, either the spirit of the late Paddy Doolan had mislaid its former prospecting sense, or Mac was on the wrong end of the spirit telephone, for he never raised even so much as a colour of the precious metal.

Suddenly a sound caught his quick ears, and the next instant he was clambering up the side of the sluit until his head was on a level with the surrounding veldt, and his eyes fell upon a scene that made him forget his search for gold, though it awakened his hunter's instinct and set his nerves thrilling. Three hundred yards away from him, out in the open, a great herd of wildebeest, the miniature buffalo of Africa, were galloping in single file. The herd was strung out for a distance of nearly half a mile. The leader had just passed Mac's hiding-place at a flying gallop, the second beast had its muzzle within six inches of the root of the leader's tail, and every other animal in the herd followed in precisely the same position, a long thin line of virile life, each animal so like its neighbour in size, shape and colour, that a photograph of one would have been a photograph of the herd. The pace at which they were travelling would have kept a good horse at an easy gallop.

"Losh," muttered Mac. "Eef A canna get gold, A can get beef, an' wi' this sun A can mak' 'biltong' enough to keep me an' ma mate goin' f'r months."

Pulling himself up on to the veldt, Mac stretched himself out at full length, without taking any great care to conceal himself, for he knew the ways of wildebeest that turn neither to right nor to left when travelling, and seem to have no individual thought or impulse beyond the mere action of following their leader, and no eyes for anything except the ground immediately in front of them. Mac fired, and one of the animals which was to a buffalo what a Shetland pony is to a draught horse, went down on its muzzle and knees, shot through the heart. This gapped the long line, but the animal immediately behind the fallen creature leaped over the fallen carcass as nimbly as a roebuck, and closed up on the line in front, and each succeeding beast did the same, until Mac's rifle barked once more, and another animal dropped in its tracks, when the same manœuvre was repeated by the rest of the herd. When Mac considered that he had got as much beef as he required, he ceased shooting, for it was never his way to destroy merely for the sake of destroying, unless he was up against something he thought was better out of the world than in it.

As soon as the last of the mob had passed upon its way, McGlusky went methodically to work skinning the carcasses and cutting away the beef that he knew would be the best for the making of "biltong," the sun and smoke-dried meat in universal use in the hinterland of Africa. He worked hard and swiftly, though all his movements were unhurried. As he took the tit-bits from each animal, he laid the steaks on the newly stripped hide, piling the meat in the centre; then, with a skill born of long practice, he brought the edges of the hide together, and made the spoil into huge packages.

The sun was going down, and he was still a good way from finishing his labours, when, lifting his eyes in the cautious manner which becomes an instinct with men who live in the wilds, he saw a horseman riding towards him and leading a pack horse. One glance was enough. Instantly Mac straightened his broad back, and muttered: " It's Buck O'Grady—ma mate." The newcomer had evidently seen him for some time past, for he was steering his horses straight in McGlusky's direction. He was a little man, this newcomer, and crouched dejectedly in his saddle, a fact which Mac was not slow to notice, for he had been keenly watching his mate's approach, whilst a flush of embarrassment and shame had overspread his rugged features.

" A wunner wha' the deil ails Buck O'Grady. He's sittin' in his saddle like a wet hen on a wash-tub, an' that's no like Buck. Maistly he's perched up like a cock-sparrow on a bough full o' blossoms i' the bird-courtin' season." He took another steady look at the oncoming horses and rider. " Never saw Buck travel at that pace in a' ma born days. He's crawlin' as if there was a funeral in front o' him, an' he's afraid he'll catch up tae it. Maist times he'd come in whoopin'. A'm theenkin' he's picked up the veldt fever, or——" His stiff figure wilted as the afterthought flashed through his mind: " P'raps Buck has met some in-goin' claim-jumpin' blastie, an' he has heard hoo the mate he trusted has let him down. Lord Almichty—Jamie McGlusky eef ever ye feel a meaner skunk than ye dae at this meenit, the Lord hae mercy on ye, ye whuskey-suckin', wumman-worshippin', bone-headed blastie."

He groaned aloud in contrition of spirit, for the man he was waiting for had first found him years before in a lonesome gully, where he had crawled like a wounded beast into the outflung shadow of a rock to die, torn to pieces by cholera born of drinking blackwater. So near to the shadows was McGlusky on that occasion, that when O'Grady looked down on his pallid, pain-distorted face, he had counted McGlusky past praying for, and only fit for a burying, but having searched and found the heart still beating beneath the soiled and tattered shirt, he had promptly set to work to nurse the waif of the wilds back to life and strength. Only those who know what acute cholera under such circumstances is like, can form any idea of the task, but the sturdy little man had not shirked his job. Somehow he had got the befouled clothing from the great gaunt carcass of the almost dead man, and then, having provided himself with warm water, he had sponged the awful body clean, and rolled it in his own blankets. After that it had been a case of tireless nursing, until a day came when Mac, shaky of hands and legs, could pull on his own garments, which O'Grady had washed and left to bleach in the fierce African sunshine. From that hour the men had been mates, and had shared toil, privation, adventure and such happiness as can come to pioneers in the lonesome places of the world. It was of that first meeting, and the nursing and loving care that McGlusky was thinking, as he watched his mate advancing at a snail's pace, for the nearer he got, the slower O'Grady travelled his horses.

When the little man got fairly close, McGlusky caught the first good view of the Irish face, that so far he had been able to obtain, for Buck had pulled his well-worn and somewhat greasy slouch hat so far forward that its brim covered even the tip of his nose, and he was carrying his stubbly chin upon his chest. If ever a man looked the picture of dejection, the little Irishman did at that moment. Something had caused him momentarily to lift his head, and McGlusky caught a glimpse of a face patched and criss-crossed with sticking-plaster, a face swollen and bruised, until every feature was distorted. No one, not even a police court reporter, would ever have described Buck O'Grady as a beauty ; his mouth had always been too large, his cheeky little nose, which turned up at the point was, in its normal condition, too small for the face of a man ; now Mac could scarcely see that nose at all, because of the discoloured lumps upon each cheek-bone.

The sight was enough for Mac. He made a bound forward, and, running to his mate's side, he reached up his big arms, and lifted the man from the saddle as though he were a child, and as Buck's feet touched the soil, he staggered, groaned, and would have fallen, but Mac's left arm went round him, cradling him in its grip as an Amazon might cradle her babe. Tearing the greasy, battered hat from Buck's head, Mac glared down on to the ruin of what had been a man's face.

" Wha's awa' wi' ye, Bucky, ma laddie ? Wha's done this tae ye, ma mate ? Hae ye been at a Kaffir weddin' an' tried tae get awa' wi' the bride, or hae ye been trodden on by a bullock team ? "

The Irishman could see just a little out of one eye, and he raised that orb to the big glowering face above him.

" Och, Mac, ut's nayther ; ut's just a foight I got tangled up wid."

" Fight," growled Mac. " Ye didna' come by this, an' this, an' this, an' that in any fair man-fight."

As he spoke, he touched with infinite gentleness one plaster-encased gash on the face of his pal with a big fore-finger that somehow was as soft as the touch of a woman's hand.

"Cut it out, Mac," almost sobbed O'Grady. "Oi only got what Oi desarved, an' only a half av that. Oi'm a waster, pardner. Oi'm not a man, Oi'm a rat, an'—an'—be the soul of me sainted mother, who died at the washtub in dear dirty Dublin, workin' her fingers to the bone to kape me an' nine others loike me from starvin', if me head had been bate off an' kicked on again, Oi'd still be owin' somethin' to the powers that gave a man the things he desarves to get. Take your arm away from me, Mac; your kindness hurrts me more than the bashin' that Oi got in the town. Oi'm a rat, Mac, a rat."

"Ye're a leear," rumbled the big fellow, "and if any ither mon said tae me wha' ye're sayin' aboot yersel', A'd beat the grace o' God intae him, an' tie his ain twa toes roond the back o' his neck wi' his ain scalp-lock. There's no' much o' ye, ye spunky wee deil, but wha' there is, is a' man-metal, an' double proof at that. Noo, haud yer blether. A'll lift ye intae yer saddle again, an' lead the twa horses tae the spring whaur A hae left ma dunnage."

Stooping, he picked the smaller man up in his arms, and lifted him into the saddle as though he were a bunch of feathers, then, gathering up his rifle and bandolier, which he had laid aside whilst skinning and cutting up the carcasses of the wildebeest, he strode back to his mate's side. Taking his own pipe from his pouch, he first filled it carefully, and reaching up, pushed the stem between Buck's bruised and broken lips.

"Haud on tae that, ma mannie, an' pu' at it while A lead the horses. A ken naething that soothes the speerit o' a mon sae muckle as guid tobaccer, when the flesh is bruised an' the speerit dom near broken."

Whilst he was speaking, he had struck a match by drawing the head swiftly across the seat of his breeks and down his leg. Holding the flame to the narcotic weed, he crooned softly: " Pu' at it an' suck in the smoke, an' dinna say anither word until we strike camp."

" D-o-n't, Mac, for the love of Moike, don't. You're killin' me wid kindness," quavered the Irish voice.

" Somebody's been killin' ye wi' the butts o' their guns an' the toes o' their boots, or A don't know a busted face when A see yin," growled the big fellow. " Lord, give me grace tae come up wi' the scum that hae han'led ye like this. Ye were never a beauty, Bucky, but yer face at this meenit would frecht a ghaist back tae its graveyard. Noo, pu' at the pipe, an' A'll steer the horses."

" Och, Mac, the jackals will get away wid all the meat you've been collectin', whilst your mate has been——" He groaned deeply, and left his sentence unfinished.

" Dom the meat," scoffed McGlusky. " The veldt's alive wi' it. Haud on a moment, though; A'll tak' in just a couple o' steaks that'll mak' a guid supper f'r the twa o' us. A've got a packin' needle in ma outfit, an' a ball o' twine, an' when A've washed yer face an' stitched up the gashes an' made ye easy an' comfortable A'll bring the twa horses back an' pack in the meat while ye sleep, an' the guid fairies send ye sweet dreams o' the day tae come when you an' me go wi' a pick handle in our right hands, tae gie a receipt in fu' tae the twa-legged vermin who hae gi'en ye a face, Buck O'Grady, tha' wad frecht a bull oot o' a byre. No' that A'm meanin' any disrepect tae yer face, Bucky, though A've often wunnered yer mither didn'a die in childbed when first she saw it. Maybe when A've stitched up yer wounds wi' ma packin' needle an' string, ye'll no' be such a bad looker."

O'Grady groaned, for in his time he had had several samples of McGlusky's sledge-hammer surgery.

"Mother in heaven," he moaned, "it's meself that thinks Oi'll do well enough widout the packin' needle, Mac. The stickin' plaster an' a few lumps av tallow will do the thrick right enough, wid a bit av toime."

Mac uttered a contemptuous grunt, and then, moving away, helped himself to a liberal supply of wildebeest meat, which he stuffed into O'Grady's pack saddle, and then without another word he placed himself between the two horses, and taking a rein of each, struck a bee line for camp, whilst Buck O'Grady sat aloft, sucking dismally at McGlusky's big pipe, the bowl of which he had to uphold in the hollow of one of his hands.

McGlusky's first care when he arrived at the spring was to lift the little man down, and make him as comfortable as possible in a nest of blankets, both his own and his mate's, O'Grady all the time protesting feebly in disjointed passages of speech.

"Holy Mother, Mac, if yez only knew. Och, if yez only knew. It's bootin' me from here to the heights o' hell an' back again ye'd be doin', not coddlin' an' comfortin' me, ye great-hearted Scotch bonehead—you who never did a mane thing to a mate in all yer born days."

Mac winced at this tribute to his goodness and greatness of heart, and passing one horny hand gently over the little man's tousled head, he lifted his eyes skywards, and murmured:

"A'll never be able tae tell him. God o' ma faithers, send the speerit o' Micky Doolan tae whisper the truth tae him in a dream while he sleeps."

Then, rising, he shuffled off to water the horses, and having turned them free to fill themselves on the veldt grass, he began to search in his swag, and then returned to Buck O'Grady holding a packing needle in one hand and a ball of fine-spun twine in the other.

"Noo, Bucky," he crooned, "we'll no be lang.

Many's the wounded horse an' bullock A've stitched up wi' this same needle, an' eef A've nae string enough tae finish the job, A can use yer twa boot-laces."

"Och, me boot-laces. Hivins, McGlusky, hivins, McGlusky! Haven't yez a drop av laudanum in yer swag to send me to sleep while ye are sewin' me up loike a blanket?"

"A haven'a, Bucky, but dinna fash; A'll pull the lips o' those gashes on yer face thegither—eef the string doesn'a break—an' then the sun an' the wind an' a little tallow will put ye richt wi'in a month. Eef A dinna sew ye up, the veldt flies an' the dust will poison yer wounds, an' ye'll no' heal till the crack o' doom. Bite on the bullet, pairtner, an' every time A stick the needle intae ye, just think o' the happy day when you an' me get loose amang the twa-legged jackals that did these things tae ye."

Without further ado, he began sponging away the dry blood and pulling off the sticking-plaster, and then he commenced to sew, and Buck O'Grady commenced to swear.

"Yer language is awfu'," commented Mac after one fearful outburst of profanity from his victim. "Why dinna ye stop swearin' an' think o' a hymn?"

"Hymns be damned," groaned the Irishman. "If yez are goin' to do any more, stun me first wid a hammer; your mendin's worse than the gang's breakin'."

The rough surgical job was finished at last to McGlusky's entire satisfaction, though, judging from the prolonged outbursts of profanity that came from the depths of the blankets, he would not have been likely to obtain a diploma of merit as a surgeon from his mate.

Whilst Buck O'Grady slept, McGlusky took the two horses out to where he had made his kill, intending to bring in the wildebeest meat, ready for jerking on the morrow. Intense was his rage and disgust upon nearing the spot, where he had left his kill, to hear unmistakable sounds of strife going on between four-footed vermin of the jackal type, and a big swarm of aasvogels.

" The deil has run awa' wi' ma luck, an' buttoned it in his boots," he muttered wrathfully, as he surveyed the scene. " A thocht A was goin' tae have enough jerked beef tae carry me an' ma mate ower a long trek, but wha' these blasties haven't eaten they've fouled. A' the cross-currents in ma life seem tae hae met this week, wi' me i' the centre o' a maelstrom. A canna dae yin thing richt. The Lord kens when A'll rin against anither herd o' wildebeest."

He glowered savagely through the star-studded night at the squawking, snapping, yapping mob of birds and beasts, then, " Here's at ye," he snarled, and with almost lightning speed he put a dozen bullets into the thick of the marauders, and having sated his anger to that extent, he swung himself on to O'Grady's hack, and without a backward glance in the direction of the havoc he had wrought, he led the pack horses back to where his mate lay sleeping uneasily, and having leg-roped the pair, turned his attention to securing his own night's rest. As he had used his own blankets to make the injured man comfortable, there was nothing for him to do but to stretch his gaunt frame out on the hard earth, and in this manner to woo slumber. For a pillow he had selected a large-sized stone he had found at the side of the spring; it was not a smooth stone, just a crude lump that some storm had torn from the near-by kopje. As he tried to snuggle his ear down into this prehistoric pillow, he ejaculated:

" It's nae as saft as the shoulder o' the wumman in white, but it'll dae."

He did all he knew to court slumber, but do what he would, he wooed sleep in vain for a long time. He tried building a mental picture of the long line of wildebeest, as he had seen them before he had commenced shooting, and began to count them, in the hope that the monotony of such a procedure would bring slumber to him. " Yin—twa—three——" and so on, until he reached five hundred, but to his disgust he was more wide awake at the finish than he was at the beginning.

" Curse it a'," he grumbled. " A ken weel wha's wrong wi' me. It's the thocht o' the morn's morn, when A'll hae tae tell ma puir innocent mate, who maybe is dreamin' the noo he's a millionaire, how A, Jamie McGlusky, doddered his wealth awa', an' a' because A wanted tae feel the cling o' the twa red lips o' a wumman. A did feel the cling o' them, an' they burned intae ma bluid like raw rum intae a red wound, until A felt like a bull walkin' on the mountain tops. A bull on the mountain tops—A was only a he-goat that didna' ken grass frae gravel. A'll wager she's sittin' roond a camp fire the nicht, awa' back on ma ain diamond claim i' the volcano crater, mockin' at me an' ma kisses, tae a bunch o' baboon-faced bounders who wull be splittin' their sides laughin' as they listen tae the story, an' ma name wull be a byword an' a reproach among the white heathen f'r years tae come."

He lay for a while, grinding his teeth over the perfervid picture his imagination had conjured up. Sleep came to him at last, and he did not awaken until the keen, cold wind that always creeps across the veldt in the hour before the dawn, bit into his scantily-clad figure. Moving a little distance away from his resting-place, so that the sound of his footsteps might not awaken his mate, Mac strode up and down, swinging his long arms in order to bring some warmth into his frame. His fire had gone out, and he knew it was useless for him to search around in the dark for chips of dried animal manure that game animals might have dropped, but when the dawn came he got busy, and as it had been a watering-place for big game of all kinds, he soon found what he sought; then, searching through his scanty possessions, he rummaged out two canvas bags, one containing coarse brown sugar, the other being filled with tea. A handful of sugar and a handful of tea he flung into his billycan, and to this he added a couple of pints of water from the spring. Sitting on his heels in front of his fire, Mac boiled his billy, the whiles he stirred the sweet mess inside it with a twig cut from a thorn bush. By the time he had boiled the mixture to his own satisfaction, the sun had risen, and Mac glanced towards his mate, debating within himself whether he should blurt out the story of the lost fortune before he fed the invalid, or wait until the wounded man had breakfasted.

"A canna gie him the bad news on an empty stomach, it's nae fair," he muttered. "Losh, if he only rises up an' bashes me wi' a pick han'le, A'd take it kindly o' him. A feel as though A had robbed a church, or started a fecht i' a nunnery. He's a gran' wee mannie, eef he is as ugly as a gargoyle, an' ma treachery wull break the heart o' him. Weel, here's tae ma job, though A'd rather face a firin' squad wi' ma back tae the wall." Stooping, he picked up the billycan, and a tin pannikin.

As he approached the bundle of blankets, he saw that Buck O'Grady was awake, for his one good eye was open and fixed mournfully upon the face of McGlusky.

"You're lookin' fine the morn, Buck, ma mannie; the top o' yer head is the same shape as it used tae be, an' yer face wull no be sae bad when the swellin's gone doon. Dinna fash aboot the gashes an' cuts;

when they've healed an' A've taken the stitches oot, A'll heat ma stirrupiron i' the fire an iron oot maist o' the scars, as A've seen ma mither iron oot patches on an old shirt."

"Wirra, wirra, don't be afther frettin' about me face, Mac, yez dear kind-hearted divil; if yez was to take the butt end av a ridin' boot an' bate a few more lumps on to the map av me face, I'd take ut as a birthday present an' be grateful."

"Haud yer whisht, wee mannie; ye're no quite richt i' yer head yet."

As he spoke, Mac passed his left arm under O'Grady's shoulders, and lifted him to a sitting posture.

"Don't, Mac, don't," almost blubbered O'Grady. "I'm not fit for yez to touch wid a burnt stick."

McGlusky made little cooing noises that sounded wondrous strange, coming from the middle of such a granite face.

"Drink this, Bucky, ma pal," he murmured, holding out a pannikin full of the sticky black liquid he had brewed.

"Pwhat is ut?" exclaimed O'Grady, eyeing the concoction suspiciously. "If ut's horse medicine, I'll drink ut to plaise yez, but if ut's wan av thim herbal things yez invents yerself, throw ut away, an' give me a bating instead."

"It's not; it's somethin' A learnt frae the Arabs i' the desert. It's a better pick-me-up than whuskey. It's just black tea an' sugar boiled tae a syrup. It'd pu' ye thegither, Bucky, if ye were on yer last legs. A've been savin' it f'r just such an emergency as this, an' it's glad A am tae be able tae dae this wee bittie f'r ye."

With a surprisingly sudden movement, O'Grady thrust away the pannikin and rose to his feet, then facing McGlusky, he stretched out both arms and his voice broke into a piteous wail.

"It's meself that's the meanest skunk that iver wore throusers, McGlusky, me mate. Oi hadn't the pluck to tell yez when Oi rode up to yez last night, but me heart's fair bruk when yez comes fadin' me wid the milk av human kindness. Mac, yez boneheaded Scotchman, ye think y're a millionaire, but y're bruk an' Oi'm bruk to the wide wide worrld, an' Oi'm the divil that bruk yez—me, Bucky O'Grady, yer mate. Holy Moike, if Oi was boiled in oil an' left in hell to simmer, Oi couldn't feel worse inside meself than I do this minute. Hit me, Mac, just once; hit me so's Oi go round loike a cart-wheel."

Whilst the little man was ridding himself of this sudden burst of oratory, McGlusky stood gaping at him with amazement written on every line of his cast-iron countenance.

"Won't yez hit me just once for the sake av our ould time friendship?" wheeled O'Grady.

"Wha's bitin' ye, Bucky?"

"Bitin' me?" The Irishman's voice rose almost to a scream. "Oi've played yez false, Oi've done yez down. Not manin' to, McGlusky, not manin' to——" The last words came out almost with a sob. "Ochone, ochone, ut was the cursed whisky an' the daughters av the scarlet woman that did ut, Mac. Oi got into the town wid the last of our money in me pocket, an' ut was a holiday, an' no warden's court was open, an' Oi drifted into a pub to drink yer health, Mac, an' when I had wan, I had another, just drinkin' to the health of me widdered mother in dirty Dublin an' then I had wan for meself, an' by that time Oi was makin' friends wid some females wid paint enough on 'em to have made a picture of a rainbow, an' they introduced me to some friends av theirs, an'—an' Oi made a present av one of the diamonds that Oi'd taken in to prove the truth av our claim at the Warden's Court to wan av the Jezebels, because she said her name was O'Grady, too, afther Oi'd told her me own. An' then we had some dancin' an' singin', and we washed the dancing down wid more drink, until Oi didn't know whether ut was a wake, a weddin' or a war party Oi was at, an' they got the rest av the diamonds, Mac, then all me money an' the maps you drew, an' the plan an' location av our diamond mine, an' when I saw thim gettin' away wid me papers, some spark av sense an' decency came back to me, an' Oi remembered me mate, the great, grand, clean-hearted McGlusky, who never did a mane thing to a pardner, that wouldn't let a throllop lead him astray from his duty. An' Oi hit the man who had the papers wid the edge of a pewter pot, not manin' to hurt him, but just to get yer papers back. Then hell broke loose in that shebeen, an' they hit me wid everything barrin' a boat-hook ; they'd have hit me wid that, if we hadn't been a thousand miles from the sea, an' when they wasn't hittin' me, they was kickin' me, an' the she-tortoise who said her name was O'Grady was behint me, hangin' on to me hair wid both hands. Then they threw me into a pigsty at the back av the shebeen, an' when I woke up ut was the mornin' afther the night before, an' the nigger stable bhoy told me that thirty av the biggest scalliwags in town had mounted their horses in hot haste, an' had ridden out to look for you, Mac, because they knew the general location of our diamond discovery, though they didn't know the exact spot, because you hadn't written that down for fear of accidents. Yez remember, pardner, ye left that for me to fill in at the Warden's Court. Oi was pretty near dead for days, Mac, an' no one came near me but the nigger bhoy, an' he made me a feast av what the pigs didn't want or wouldn't ate, an' as soon as Oi was able to sit in the saddle, I hiked out here, to bring me shame an' me sorrer to yez, bad cess to me for a drunken, wanton-worshippin' wastrel. It's meself that should have stayed in the sty, an' sent a pig out to yez. Och, Mac, Oi can't look yez in the face, even wid me one eye," and with a sound that was half-sob, half-groan, the little man dropped to his knees on the veldt, and wound his arms imploringly around the other man's long legs.

Then McGlusky stooped and lifted the quivering body from the grass-covered soil, and hugged the small frame to him, whilst a big, slow, joyous smile chased every atom of care from his features; then, pulling off his greasy hat with one hand, and still clutching Bucky to his chest with the other, he raised his face to the skies, and exclaimed with a lilt of gratitude in his voice:

"God o' ma faithers, A thank thee. A've lost ma diamonds, but ma certie, A havena' lost ma mate." The next moment he had turned Bucky's battered face up so that he might look into it. "Dinna fash, Bucky, dinna; it's no' you' fau't, God kens; it was the scarlet wumman an' the whuskey that did it. Noo grip ma hand, an' we'll make a solemn covenant we'll never mention the matter again."

And Bucky O'Grady, who only knew one side of the story, turned away muttering chokingly:

"Holy Moike, phwat a mate, phwat a *man!*"

Acc No: 1781

CHAPTER III

A NEW TRAIL

DURING the weeks that followed Buck O'Grady's confession and revelation, and McGlusky's noble-hearted (?) forgiveness, Buck hung around camp, spending a great deal of his time on his blankets, nursing his wounds, whilst the big man ranged the veldt in search of game. He did not run into another herd of wildebeest, those strange animals having a custom of their own of going where and how they pleased, seldom remaining long in any one vicinity. Game of all kinds was unaccountably scarce, but he seldom returned to camp without the haunches of a deer of some sort slung on his broad shoulders. He went afoot during these days, because he wanted to rest the horses in case of emergency; knee-haltered they could not wander far from camp, and at sundown they were sure to return to the spring for water. Whilst Mac was afoot, Buck O'Grady, at spasmodic intervals, collected animal "chips" with which to make a long, narrow lane of fire; this, when judiciously watered, resolved itself into a line of smoke; at each end of his smoke line O'Grady planted a pronged stick, along which he stretched a piece of cord; when the smoke fire was ready, the Irishman cut streaks of meat from the deer haunches, a couple of inches in width, and suspended them from the cord in the smoke, and what with the hot rays of the sun, the heat of the fire below and the ever rising smoke, a goodly supply of biltong was provided. The venison shrivelled to half its original proportions under the combined influence of heat and smoke, but all its juices remained within itself, and as long as they had biltong and a little tea to wash it down, the two pioneers felt that they had little to fear from the future. They lived on fresh meat whilst they could get it, knowing they would have their fill of biltong when the trek commenced. Every night they discussed plans for a new battle for fortune, but always they came up against the problem of ready money, for they were almost out of that most useful commodity. Money they must have, in order to lay in supplies, purchase ammunition and dynamite, and whatever mining tools they might hope to pick up at some little inland Boer dorp. One thing rankled very much in McGlusky's soul, and that was the purloining of his horse and saddle by the woman or her assistants on the night when the woman in white had fooled him to the top of his bent. He voiced this matter one evening to Bucky, and the Irishman promptly put a query that had been seething in his brain ever since he had discovered that Mac was without horse and saddle.

"Phwat went wrong wid yer horse, Mac? Shure, Oi've been goin' to ask yez a hundred toimes, but shame for the way Oi threated you when you trusted me to go an' secure our ground, kep' me tongue-tied."

Mac combed his beard with his big fingers whilst he pondered over his reply.

"Wee mannie," he answered, adopting his most judicial manner and tone of voice, "did ye ever ken Jamie McGlusky tae tell a barefaced lee?"

It was the Irishman's turn to stroke his chin reflectively.

"No, Mac. By the soul av me, Oi cannot say Oi've iver bowled yez out wid a lie, but by the soul av me sainted gran'mother, Oi've known yez to walk around a lie as if yez loved it. Phwat's become av yer horse an' saddle, Mac?"

" A canna tell ye the whole story, Bucky, because there's a—imph—wumman in it."

Bucky had two good eyes by this time, and he fixed them both very hard on the face of his friend.

" Och, a wumman in ut ? Is she in the saddle, or in the horse, or is she only in the story, Mac ? "

Mac waved his hand airily, as if loftily dismissing the query, and instead of answering his mate's question, he asked one himself, which is an excellent way to get out of a tight corner.

" Dae ye ken the wee hotel that lies between the two red kopjes that we passed yince when we were searchin' f'r dimonds, before we foond the crater ? "

" Oi do," said Bucky.

" Weel, A tarried there yin nicht when ye were awa', an' A left ma horse an' saddle in charge o' the wumman who kep' the pub, an' Bucky, someone stole the outfit while A—A—slep'."

" Didn't yez make a claim on the woman for another horse an' saddle, McGlusky ? "

" Hoo could A ? " demanded Mac in tones of lofty virtue. " Hoo could A, Bucky, an' she a widdy wid nae mon tae protect her ? "

" And yez niver said a word to her, Mac ? "

" A did not," replied the big fellow emphatically, " not yin dommed worrd."

Bucky pondered over this for a minute or two, and then with a twinkle in his Irish eyes, he demanded :

" Was she as good-lookin' as all that, Mac ? Bedad, Oi've seen yez pull a place to pieces before now for less than the loss av a horse an' a saddle. Say, Mac, did the man that looted your horse an' saddle get away wid your shirt, too, or did the widder get that ? "

" A'm theenkin' Meester O'Grady, we'll find somethin' else tae talk aboot," responded Mac stiffly, and when Bucky heard himself addressed as " Mister " he knew that the ice was thin, and wisely got off it.

Whilst Bucky was wrapped in sleep that night, McGlusky rose stealthily, picked up his rifle and bandolier, and moved out of camp as noiselessly as any Zulu warrior ; even the grass did not rustle around his carefully lifted feet. When he had put some fifty yards between himself and his sleeping comrade, he stopped like a statue, and very carefully and unerringly took his bearings from the stars. When he had got both the location of the camp and the direction he intended to travel firmly fixed in his mind, he sprang forward and began to move at a long loping trot that he had learnt long before from the Zulus. As a rule when he was walking, he carried his figure as uprightly as a lance, but now, knowing the task he had in his mind, he ran with muscles flexed, head and shoulders pushed well forward, and his sinewy legs moving easily. He did not put on a burst of speed, the gait he had chosen was one of endurance rather than pace. He had learnt it from men who, big and heavy as himself, could in a long run wear down an ordinary riding hack. Every now and again he turned his eyes to the stars, correcting his course without checking his movements. During his many hunting expeditions to secure the meat which was to carry him and Buck O'Grady on their proposed trek, he had noticed clouds of dust rising far away across the veldt, and always in one particular direction, and his common sense had told him that this was a new track being cut across the plains by people travelling to and from the new diamond find in the crater to the nearest township or dorp, and McGlusky had this night decided to steer across country in such a manner as to intersect this trail.

He was a leg-weary and sleep-heavy man when he reached his destination, and if any man had followed him from his camp to that spot, they might have been forgiven for wondering what his intentions were, but there was no wonderment in his own mind. Once having reached the trail, he looked up and down it, shining white and dusty in the sun's rays. He could see for miles in both directions, but whichever way he looked he saw no sign of life, but a mile to the northward he could plainly distinguish a big cluster of rocks.

" Iphm," he mused, " eef A'm no' mistaken in ma calculations, it's at yon'er rocks that travellers goin' tae *ma mine* wull halt an' ootspan their teams, an' they owe me a horse. Maybe it wullna be the same pairties that borrowed ma ain beastie an' ma saddle, but it'll be the same tribe an' wha' the indeeveedual owes tae Jamie McGlusky the tribe wull hae tae pay. They didn't ca' it stealin' when they took ma beastie; they may ca' it wha' they like when I tak' yin or mair o' theirs. It's naethin' but the richt an' proper fulfilment o' the old Mosaic law o' ' an eye f'r an eye,' an' that means in ma judgment, 'a horse f'r a horse' an' twa eef A can get them or may be three : yin as recompense f'r ma ain property, an' yin f'r interest."

Sprawling himself out by the track, he drew a length of freshly dried biltong from a little canvas haversack he had carried slung across his shoulders, and unsheathing his long knife, he cut the biltong into small wedges and ate them raw, washing his primitive meal down with a draught of cold tea which he had carried in a native gourd in the haversack. Having finished his meal quite to his own satisfaction, he lit his pipe, picked up his belongings, and rather wearily strode off towards the rocks he had noted when he arrived at the track.

" I could dae wi' a sleep," he murmured, as if talking to his own shadow, " but ma first duty tae masel' an' ma mate is tae fin' a hidin' place an' tak' cover. Eef A rest here i' the open, some blastie may come ridin' by an' see me, an' though the errand A'm bent on is a simple matter o' justice, it's just as weel eef A leave nae evidence behind me. Eef a pairty camps at yon'er rocks the nicht an' lose a horse or twa, maist likely they'll blame some 'footsacker' who has followed them fra the dorp. It's nae ma fau't eef they blame the wrong mon; they're all thieves, anyhow, stealin' ma diamonds, sae eef yin punishes the ither, it wull be the A'michty's ways o' dealin' oot justice." He wagged his head solemnly as this thought coursed through his brain. "Aye," he commented, "the ways o' God are wunnerfu' an' mysterious. Who shall blame Him eef He uses me as an instrument tae punish evil-doers?"

He seemed to get a good deal of satisfaction from his crude interpretation of the ways of Divine Providence, and his tobacco began to taste sweeter in his mouth.

As soon as he reached the large cluster of rocks which ran some hundreds of yards out on to the veldt at right angles to the trail, he began to plume himself upon his perspicacity, for there were abundant signs that this was a halting place and a night encampment for people travelling to and from the new diamond location. The grey ashes of numerous camp fires were readily discernible, and the usual litter of a common camping ground was strewn around. Going to one of the grey ash heaps, he turned it over with his foot, disclosing live embers beneath.

"A thocht sae," he chuckled. "Weel, weel, A've naething tae dae noo but rest until nightfall, for it wouldna be wise f'r me tae try an' coax a horse awa' even eef a pairty did camp here i' the daytime. Bucky will wunner wha' has become o' me, but he'll theenk A've gone further afield than usual wi' ma huntin'. A'll get a horse easily enough the nicht, eef any camp here, but it willna' be sae easy tae get a saddle an' bridle, but A'll trust i' the Lord, an' maybe eef there's a swag lyin' loose, A'll get a shirt or twa as well."

Once again he examined the track with his far-seeing eyes in both directions, and finding the coast clear, he walked out on to the veldt at the edge of the rocks, searching amidst the boulders with his shrewd eyes for a suitable hiding-place, but did not find one until he had got almost to the extreme end of the piled-up rocks, but at last he spied what he sought. It was but a narrow opening between two big boulders that nearly met at their topmost edge, but splayed out a yard or two at their base. Crawling into this, he found there was room enough for him to lie down comfortably, and as his hiding-place was well up on the razor back, he had a perfect view of the trail without being himself visible to any traveller. As he laid himself down, he discovered that the whole length of his impromptu chamber was covered with small fragments of broken pebbles.

"Dom the stones," he grumbled. "It's strange hoo adversity seems tae follow a righteous mon. Eef A were a robber or a thievin' claim-jumper, it's any odds I wad find somethin' nice an' saft tae sleep on. A'weel, A'll no' complain at wha' ye're puttin' across me, O Lord. After a while nae doot the flesh o' ma limbs will fit intae the stones, an' p'raps eef A'm no sleepin' too easy A'll no' sleep too long. It's weel eef A'm awake when the travellers off-saddle an' ootspan their horses; it will gie me a gran' chance tae pick oot the best beastie i' the outfit. You'll forgie me f'r grumblin', O Lord; A didn'a think o' that when A first felt the broken stones bitin' intae the flesh o' ma buttocks, but noo A ken Thy wisdom tae one o' Thy lambs, A put masel' i' Thy hands while A sleep. Richt weel A ken hoo i' days of auld ye fed anither prophet named Elisha when he was awa' i' lonesome places; ye sent ravens tae feed him, an' A hae faith ye'll send me a horse. Ye send the beastie, O Lord, an' A'll dae the rest."

To Mac there was nothing incongruous about such a prayer as this. All his life he had been religious, but his religion consisted of a brand he had manufactured for himself.

Slumber fell upon him like the dews from heaven. Hour after hour passed whilst he lay cradled in the arms of the god or goddess of sleep, pulling in through his widely dilating nostrils fresh energy and vitality for big deeds yet to be done. A couple of African jackals, that had laired in the cavity which McGlusky had confiscated, crept up through the rock and scanty shrubbery on feet that were padded with silence, and stood looking in upon this strange visitant, each beast standing on three paws with the fourth forepaw slightly raised, for with their eternal cunning, they were ready to drop the raised forepaw and leap into instant flight. They sampled McGlusky with their eyes, ears and twitching nostrils, then the dog looked at the bitch and the bitch looked back at the dog, and their eyes were eloquent and seemed to say: "This man is not our meat." Dropping their flags, they backed away as noiselessly as a couple of shadows, and went in search of another hiding-place. As the sun dipped, the shadows from the big cluster of rocks lengthened out on Nature's magic mirror, which portrays everything in its place and season. Twilight, the swift, evanescent twilight of the African veldt, made up of ever changing tones of grey colour, fell upon the world, and the stillness was like an unspoken prayer, and in that hour McGlusky awakened. For perhaps the tenth part of a second he lay absolutely still, with eyes wide open, questing with his ears for any sound that might betoken danger or the need for caution. Not a twig snapped, not a bough rustled amidst the thorn scrub. His world was as still as a lake at rest. Having satisfied himself on this point, McGlusky stretched his limbs, and as he did so, words slipped through his lips that would never have been mistaken for a prayer at vesper time.

" Ouch, hell, this is nae way tae treat a faithful servant, O Lord. Ma flesh is as fu' o' sharp pebbles as the mooth o' a bogus company promoter is o' lees." Gingerly lifting himself up, he brushed the sharp splinters of rock from the side of his buttocks, his shoulder, flank and legs. " A canna unnerstan' it," he snarled. " Why is the way o' the transgressor sae smooth, an' the path o' the pilgrim who tries tae dae richt sae dommed tough ? "

Having eased his feelings, he fed himself once again on raw biltong and cold tea, for long experience had taught this nomad that an empty man is only half a man in an emergency.

" Reeleegion's a gran' thing, an' a great bulwark i' times o' tribulation," he muttered, " but a fu' belly is nae tae be despisit."

An impatient man by nature, McGlusky had yet schooled himself in the hard usages of the world to the power of an almost limitless patience. Lying prone upon his stomach, his elbows resting upon what he described to himself as " twa nice saft rocks," his chin propped in the hollows of his hands, he watched the track, much as a lion watches a game trail o' nights and for the same purpose. Suddenly his big body quivered ; his magically quick ears had caught a sound even before his sharp eyes had noted anything. From that moment his sight was fixed to the northward on the line of the winding trail. A little cloud of dust that was scarcely discernible in the grey cloud of twilight, appeared at last, but every moment it grew bigger and clearer, until out of the haze made by the mixture of twilight and dust, the watching man could make out three light spring veldt waggons that good horse teams were drawing forward at a trot. With the waggons were little groups of horsemen. McGlusky sucked in his breath ecstatically, without giving even a passing thought to the odds that the coming cavalcade represented. Drawing his old hat from his shaggy head, he peered towards the skies, whilst an almost childlike smile sundered his whiskers.

" Forgie Thy unworthy servant f'r dootin' Thee, O Lord. Noo A ken You an' masel' are workin' thegither. A see ma horse comin'."

Such an utterance would have appeared almost blasphemous, had it not been for the note of ecstatic faith that surrounded the words like an invisible halo.

As the cavalcade drew near, McGlusky very carefully examined both his rifle and his old-fashioned border revolver.

" A'm no dootin' the power o' the Lord tae pu' me through against such long odds," he whispered to his whiskers, " but it'll dae nae harm tae see that ma artillery is in guid order. A'll get what A want when nicht fa's by stealth, an' just steal awa' like a sweet dream, an' eef the blasties see or hear me, an' start shootin', A'll dae ma wee bit best tae teach them that there are mair things i' heaven an' earth than is dreamt o' i' their pheelosophy, an' yin o' them is the art o' shootin' at the flash o' a gun i' the dark, but I'm prayin' there'll be nae bloodshed, f'r A'm a peace-lovin' mon, who only wants his richts, an' by gom A'll get 'em."

At this moment a mounted man shot out from the little group that was accompanying the first spring waggon, and cantering towards the rocks, pulled up sharply, and with experienced eyes surveyed the camping ground, then, turning in his saddle, he waved a signal to the waggoners and their escort ; it was evidently a signal that all was right for a camping ground, for the other horsemen came loping onward gaily, which they would not have done if there had been more miles to trek. The leader sat in his saddle with the slovenly ease that betokens the practised veldtsman, and McGlusky had ample time to examine the horse the man was riding.

" A grand beastie," he cooed. " A richt royal gift frae the Lord. No' a thoroughbred, but carryin' a touch o' blood for a' that. Big an' strong ahint the saddle, wi' quarters well let doon." Pausing, he sent out another appraising gaze. " Iphm—a weel ribbed up beastie ; rather high i' the wither, but deep-chested, long-reined wi' fine sloping shoulders. Iphm—ye're just the sort o' animal tae carry a mon o' ma weight, sae I'll watch wi' care whaur yon mon ootspans ye. A'm hopin' he'll bring ye this side o' the trail, an' knee-halter ye, sae that A'll hae nae trouble in claimin' ma ain. I'm theenkin' I'll christen ye Raven, because ye cam' tae me as the ravens cam' tae the prophet, an' ye'll prove a very present help i' time o' trouble."

Not for a moment did he doubt his ability to get away eventually with the horse that had taken his fancy. McGlusky never did have any doubts concerning his ability to do things which ordinary men would hesitate to attempt.

Soon all was bustle at the end of the rocks. Kaffir boys drew up the spring waggons, and, dismounting from the driving-seats, soon had the teams outspanned. The whites who had been in the saddle stripped their horses, and gave the beasts to the Kaffirs to lead out on to the veldt, and Mac noticed with deep inward delight that they all moved in his direction, possibly because the grass was better thereabouts. The watching man took little stock in the camp preparations, all his attention was focussed on the horse he had selected for his own purposes, and he wanted to spot its exact grazing ground, so that he could go directly to it without delay when the rapidly approaching darkness fell. Having made himself sure on this point, he calmly chewed biltong, and waited on events. He was too wise to light his pipe, with Kaffirs in the vicinity, for he knew that a nigger's nose is often as good as his eyes or ears. He could plainly hear the laughter and the jesting that were going on around the camp fires, and by straining his quick ears, he could catch spasmodic scraps of the campers' conversation, and thus he gathered that the spring waggons were loaded with general goods that a mining camp storekeeper was taking out to the new diamond discovery. The horsemen were a nondescript crowd of adventurers, each working off his own bat, and all going out to try their luck in various ways at making a fortune. Some of the language that drifted on the night air could not have been too choice (it seldom is in such an assembly), for Mac whispered as he combed his beard with his fingers :

" Yon's a nice mixin' o' toonship blackguards ; anythin's fish that comes tae their net. A'll nae hae much on ma conscience eef A hae tae be ungentle tae yin or mair o' them. The way they're han'lin' the names o' wummen shows the kind o' wummen they live wi'. They're just the sort o' scum tha' dealt unrighteously wi' ma mate, Bucky O'Grady. Eef A were sure it was the same bunch, A'd creep close up tae them, cover them wi' ma rifle, an' mak' them throw their hands up, an' deal faithfully wi' them."

Something that he had heard had set fire to the bellicose spirit that dwelt somewhere within McGlusky's carcass, and whilst he waited for the darkness to deepen he let his thoughts drift off to the little Irishman, who had once saved him when he was little better, as he himself phrased it, " than a muck-heap, waitin' for the aasvogels tae bury it." In fancy he saw again Buck

O'Grady's gashed, bruised and broken face, and wickedness began to bubble within him.

"The puir wee deil," he chanted, gritting his teeth together with a sound like gravel grating on glass, "they booted him i' the face, they rowelled him wi' their spurs, the blasties, an' they stole his papers, which gied them the direction tae this mine. Some o' the gang that did tha' are i' this bunch; A can hear them boastin' aboot it roond their camp fire. Lord," he whispered, turning his eyes skyward, "A ken A'm as weak as a worm when a wumman an' a whisky bottle get haud o' me, but when A'm i' ma sober senses A'm nae sae bad. Ye made me, O Lord, an' ye ken the weak spots i' the joints o' ma armour. A may be wrong, but A'm theenkin' A can hear a wee sma' voice comin' doon tae me frae heaven. A cam' here tae loot a horse tae mak' up f'r the yin that was looted frae me, but the whisper that the winds bring tae me frae the stars seems tae tell me that the Lord led me hither tae dae tae these heathens wha' they did tae Bucky O'Grady, and tae mak' a wee bit profit out o' them, as well."

He turned his head to one side, cocking his ears starward, like a sailor's parrot learning to pray. For quite a while he remained in this pose, blinking owlishly into the night.

"I'm listenin," he whispered, "waitin' f'r the message that will mak' me yin o' the Lord's elect."

Again he resumed his parrot-like pose, and for a time no sound broke the stillness, but the drifting chatter and laughter of the treasure-seekers by their camp fires. Suddenly a little gurgling chuckle broke from McGlusky's throat, and a moment later he murmured:

"A'm theenkin' A've got ma commission a'richt this time. Ma orders are tae dae tae these white heathens wha' the captain o' the hosts o' Israel did tae the hosts o' Midianites. It's a big order, O Lord, f'r Thy servant is but yin, an' they are many, but richt weel A ken ye are aware A am yin o' the Anzacs. A waesome lot o' blasties the Anzacs were, but yin virtue they had: they feared neither man nor deil, an' Thy servant will try an' live up tae the face o' his fellows. Noo A'll hae a wee bit sleep till yon blasties snuggle doon i' their blankets, then I'll rise up an' dae wha' ma richt hand findeth tae dae, an' A'll dae it wi' a' ma might f'r the sake o' Bucky O'Grady an' the Lord's commission, an' a wee bit o' deil."

Stretching himself out upon his chest, and burying his hairy face in his folded arms, he forced himself to drop off to sleep by the will power that was his.

When he awakened, the moon was dipping low, and the stars were riding high. The camp below him was hushed in slumber; every bivouac fire had burnt itself down to grey ashes. Silently McGlusky arose. Stealthily as any Zulu warrior on the war trail he moved down from his rocky eminence on to the veldt, where the winds whispered amidst the grasses. With infinite care and caution, he moved out amidst the horses, until he found the grand beast that he had selected when the diamond seekers had first pitched camp. The animal was knee-haltered, as is the way on the African veldt. Mac cut the raw-hide thong that held the fine equine head low, then, after the manner of his kind, he made friends with the horse, rubbing its velvet muzzle, breathing into its nostrils, playing with the roots of its small pointed ears, all the time making low equine noises that horses love. When he had fully established a feeling of camaraderie between himself and the noble brute, he led the animal slowly and stealthily to a spot best suited to his intended purpose; then he tied the horse to a thorn-scrub growing out of the rocks, and, laying down his rifle, he wormed his way on all fours to the sleeping camp. He had almost reached the spot where the owner of the horse lay, when another of the diamond seekers, by an adjacent camp fire, turned over uneasily from shoulder to shoulder, and then sat bolt upright. As this happened, Mac instantly sprawled himself out at full length, and lay face downwards, with his eyes glued upon the half-awakened trail trekker. For a moment the man sat quite still, as if listening with all the faculties he possessed; possibly some sixth sense had disturbed him whilst he slumbered, some menace of approaching danger, for such things happen to men who sleep on the trails. Hearing no sound, and seeing no flitting shadow, the trail trekker grunted rather disgustedly, and laid himself down again, but Mac did not move; he waited patiently until deeply intoned snores from that particular pair of blankets advertised the fact that the trail trekker had plunged back into dreamland: then he crawled a few feet nearer the storekeeper, whose horse he was bent on purloining. Close by this man's head lay his saddle and bridle, and by his side his sporting Mauser, ready charged for use. Softly, almost lovingly, Mac lifted the beautiful weapon from the grass; the feel of it in his practised hands told him it was a weapon of price. Having secured the Mauser, Mac just as gently and as silently lifted up the saddle and the bridle, and, having achieved this, he stood like a thing of stone, surveying the sleep-encompassed camp. Nothing moved. The nigger teamsters were asleep under their waggon: the white men, who had partaken freely of Cape brandy before they sought their blankets, were breathing stertorously. Having satisfied himself that no watching eyes were on him, McGlusky began to move away in the direction of the spot where he had tethered the horse. A less experienced man in the ways of war in the wilderness might have been tempted to hurry his retreat, but Mac was old in the ways of the wilds. He stretched out one long leg in a stride, and let the foot at the end of it sink softly and silently amid the grasses before he lifted the other foot, and by this slow but sure means he passed safely away from the trekkers' camp. As he approached the horse, the animal with whom he had made friends nickered softly. It was just the sort of welcome that the hard-bitten trail blazer loved. Soon he had the splendid creature bridled and saddled, with the girths braced tight, ready for any emergency. Having affixed the storekeeper's sporting Mauser to the saddle, he flung the bridle reins loosely over a thorn branch, and knew that whatever else might betide, he had made his own retreat secure. Then, much more quickly than he had moved before, he advanced upon the camp, but this time he carried his rifle clutched firmly in both his big hands. There was just a grey streak in the eastern skies, herald of a day that was about to be born ; a soft, uncertain haze was playing about the great open spaces ; it was the hour which neither darkness nor daylight can claim as its own, an uncertain light in which a moving man looks like a ghost, or a ghost like a moving man. The moment seemed to suit McGlusky, for he chortled deep down in his corded neck, emitting sounds which seemed like Satanic laughter ; the grim humour of the situation seemed to appeal to him, for his great frame shook from head to foot. Then suddenly he loosed a roar that reverberated amongst the rocks behind him, and swept outward, to be lost amongst the hollows and hillocks of the undulating veldt. It was a great roar like a wild beast's challenge to the denizens of the wild. Instantly every slumbering man had leapt to his feet, and in that instant Mac, dropping on his knees behind a boulder, covered the astounded group with his rifle.

"Up wi' yer hands, ye sons o' Belial, up wi' yer hands, or me an' ma posse o' men will pump lead intae ye," and as if to accentuate his determination to carry out his threat, Mac sent a bullet singing viciously just over the heads of the throng.

Instantly every pair of hands went skyward.

"Noo," shouted Mac, "you men wi' white skins, face forward along the trail that leads tae the new diamond find. Dinna hesitate or we'll shoot holes intae ye. Mak' nae mistake, ma men hae ye covered tae the last man."

The startled trail trekkers did not hesitate; they smelt or felt the menace of coming death in the boisterous voice that had broken in upon their slumbers. Breaking into a run, they careered along the well-defined trail, and when they had got some two hundred yards away, McGlusky tossed his rifle to his shoulder, and, touching the trigger with almost magical quickness, he sent bullets singing wickedly over the heads of the flying men. A kind of sardonic chuckle was breaking from his lips as the lead went flying, and when the last rifle crack had sounded, he fairly gurgled.

"There, ye blasties, tha' wull mak' ye think ye've a lot mair than yin man tae deal wi'." Having eased his feelings by his utterance, he broke into Homeric laughter. "A put the wind up ye," he growled, "an' yer niggers will spread the story through every kraal i' this pairt o' Africa, an' tell hoo yin mon on his lonesome sent ye on the run, yelping like a jackal pack."

Again he chuckled, for his sardonic sense of humour was at the bubbling point. It never entered into his head to consider what most surely would have happened if the gang had kept their nerve and, instead of running, had snatched up their rifles and shot him to pieces.

"A'm wonnerin'," he mused, "wha' has become o' the black sons o' Ham who were drivin' the teams. It's no' often they'll interfere i' a fecht between white men;

maistly they'll lie low an' enjoy the fun, but it's as weel tae mak' sure."

Striding over to the nearest waggon, he called out in stentorian tones, bidding the coloured boys to show themselves, and declaring that he meant them no harm. Scarcely had the echoes of his voice died away, ere a black face showed through the canvas hood at the back of the nearest waggon, and a plaintive voice exclaimed:

"You no shoot, baas, me only Kaffir boy."

"Step richt doon, boy; A'll nae hurt a hair on yer hide. Ma quarrel is wi' the white men, an' nae wi' the blacks."

The darkie grinned understandingly, and scrambling out of the waggon, he came quite fearlessly to McGlusky's side, and Mac, who knew how to handle niggers, gave him a friendly slap on the back, and told him to call up any of his coloured compatriots who might be within hail of his voice, and in a very few minutes he had all the Kaffirs belonging to the outfit crowding round him. Selecting the likeliest looking one in the group for his purpose, he ordered him to take two or three of his companions and round up all the horses that were still feeding on the veldt.

"Bring them tae me," he commanded: "An' bring them quick, an' dinna waste time chatterin' ower wha' ye've seen an' heard."

He managed to put so much menace into his curt commands that the Kaffirs realised with the swift intuition of their race that they were taking orders from a man who would speak once with his tongue and twice with his rifle, and that was the kind of "baas" they were all willing to obey.

Whilst the niggers were away collecting the horses Mac went to each camp fire, picked up every rifle, shot the breech bolt back and removed it from the weapon, thus rendering every rifle useless. The breech bolts he crammed into the best pack saddle he could find in the outfit, and when the horses came in, he went amongst them and unerringly picked out the two finest animals suitable for pack-horses, a big strong beast with a promise of speed and staying power was the first to hold his gaze. On this animal he placed the pack-saddle which he had loaded with good things from the storekeeper's waggon. When this was completed, he loaded a second pack horse, then he told the Kaffirs to help themselves to anything that might feed their fancy, an order which the grinning darkies obeyed with alacrity, and whilst they were attending to their own personal matters in the way of loot, Mac climbed to the highest peak of rock and searched the veldt with shrewd eyes in the young dawn, for any sign of the white men he had driven away from their possessions. Here and there, in the far distance, he fancied he detected something that might or might not have been a man, and whenever such an object met his view, he sent what he called a "friendly" bullet in that direction. The first time he fired, he murmured:

"That's yin f'r Bucky O'Grady. A'm no thinkin' it'll reach ye, but it'll dae tae remind ye there's mair tae be had whaur that yin cam' frae."

On the second occasion when he touched the trigger, he murmured softly:

"That's Jamie McGlusky's visitin' card, ye diamond-stealin' blasties."

It was very evident that his main purpose was to put the wind well up the unarmed men, whom he had so unceremoniously routed.

"Eet's a guid job f'r you A'm a Christian, mon, an' no' a bluidy-minded pagan, or A'd be giein' the aasvogals fresh meat f'r breakfast the morn."

Having satisfied his rancour to the extent mentioned, he came down from the rocks, carrying his rifle in one hand, and combing his whiskers with the other. A beatific smile illumined his rugged face as he looked around him upon the scene of the triumph of his strategy and daring.

" A'm feelin' a bit empty i' ma wame ; a clear conscience gies a hearty appetite, sae I'll break ma' fast before I ride."

Beckoning one of the Kaffirs to him, he ordered the black to grill him some ham on the embers, and to make a pot of coffee. When this was ready, he sat cross-legged on a flat rock, with his rifle across his lap, and ate as heartily and as unconcernedly as though he were at his own camp fire, with Bucky O'Grady in attendance.

Just as he had finished his meal, that Kaffir whom he had appointed as a sort of temporary foreman of operations, approached holding up a stone bottle of gin. An extravagant smile illuminated the black face as he held out the bottle.

" Good for wash down breakfast, baas," he gurgled. " Plenty more stone bottle in waggon."

Mac reached out one big hand, and, taking hold of the bottle, he fondled it lovingly.

" A'm theenkin'," he muttered, " a drappie o' this wouldna' dae Bucky O'Grady any harm." He turned the bottle over and over in his hand, licking his lips as he did so. " Iphm—it wouldna' be richt tae tak' this tae Bucky O'Grady unless A was sure it was the richt stuff. A swore tae ma God the day A lost oor diamond mine through makin' a beast o' masel' A'd never touch the cursed stuff again." He lifted the bottle high, as if to hurl it against a rock ; then some inner urge born of a lifetime of convivial habits, suggested a specious reason why he would be justified in breaking his oath. " It's nae f'r yersel', Jamie McGlusky," he muttered, addressing his own shadow, " it's f'r the sake o' the gran' little mate who's waitin' f'r ye back in camp, a gran' wee mate wi' the heart o' a lion. Richt weel A ken a cup o' comfort frae sic a bottle as this would help him tae forget his troubles, but——" he licked his lips once more, and the demon of alcohol gleamed from his eyes, "A daur na' tak' this back tae him unless I'm sure it's the real McKie; eef the liquor's bad, it'll dae him mair harm than guid. A'll nae be breakin' ma oath eef A sample it, because A'll be drinkin f'r Bucky, an' no' f'r masel."

Down came his arm, the neck of the stone bottle snapped against a rock, and the next moment McGlusky was sampling the contents. After a long pull at the bottle, he wiped his mouth on his hairy forearm.

"It's no' bad," he exclaimed judicially. "It wad be better eef it were Old Keg whusky brewed in Scotlan', which is the best tipple brewed ootside o' Paradise, but this——" he tipped the stone bottle upwards to his mouth again, "is nae sae bad, seein' it was brewed by a Dutchman."

Putting the now sadly depleted bottle down by his side, Mac rose and walked towards the storekeeper's waggon, a peculiar flush staining the flesh about his high cheek bones. There was a queer springiness in his step, and with an upward fling of one of his arms, he set his greasy old hat at a rakish angle, and as he walked, he began to chant:

"Gie us peace in oor time, O Lord,
Peace that passeth all unnerstandin',
But eef the blasties who owned this loot
Come lookin' for trouble, an' come per boot,
Let me teach 'em the way the Anzacs shoot
When there's a mon at the end o' a gun."

Collecting a dozen stone bottles from the storekeeper's waggon, he rammed them into his pack-saddle, and as he buckled the straps he crooned:

"There, Bucky O'Grady, ye'll ken when A get this tae ye, A didna' forget ma mate."

Then he went back to his own particular perquisite and this time he did not leave the stone bottle until it was as dry as Sahara sand. Something in his altered appearance when he turned round and faced them, made the little knot of Kaffirs realise to the full that distance, and a lot of it, was the best thing they could place between themselves and this flushed and gleaming-eyed white giant. Every man among them had made himself a nice parcel of loot, and when Mac ordered them in a voice that had grown quaintly thick, to saddle each for himself a horse, and to drive all the other horses in camp back in the direction they had come, they obeyed with an alacrity that spoke volumes for their sense of the fitness of things. As the niggers rode away, driving the loose horses in front of them, Mac paced up and down with his rifle in the hollow of his arm, swaggering like any swashbuckler of the days of old. Sometimes he glanced away to the left, where he knew the white trail trekkers were concealing themselves out beyond the reach of his rifle ; anon he would pause and look far up the trail to the right, where the mounted Kaffirs and the loose horses were disappearing in a cloud of dust. At length, when even his keen eyes could see nothing at either end of the trail, he grinned sardonically.

" A'weel," he crooned, " the best o' friends must pairt, an', ma certie, A've pairted those white diamond robbers frae their horses, an' A've pairted their rifles frae the breech bolts, so noo A'm thinking A've paid some o' the debt that was ootstandin' between the claim-jumpers, Bucky, ma mate, an' masel'."

With a few quick strides and a spring he was in the saddle, the pack-horse's halters were in his hand, his rifle slung over his back, his battered old hat cocked at a disreputable angle, and the next moment he was cantering off on his return journey. He did not know it, but in that moment the finger of fate had turned the wheels of time backward, and he looked and felt like some moss trooper of old returning from a successful foray. The thing he had done did not seem to him to be anything in the least unusual: he was for the time being just one of the old clan McGlusky, who hundreds of years before had righted their own wrongs with their own strong hands. With unerring certainty he steered a course back to his own camp, with the same instinct that guides the vulture through uncharted ways. He was quite sober and abnormally hungry when he checked the three tired horses by the little spring at the foot of the kopje where Bucky O'Grady stood awaiting him. The Irishman still retained many of the outward and visible signs of the bad breaking up he had received, especially in regard to the gashes on his face, which McGlusky had stitched up with a packing needle, but his indomitable spirit enabled him to triumph over the ills of the flesh, for though small of stature, Bucky was as game as a bull ant. The moment his eyes fell upon the three splendid horses that McGlusky had brought into camp, the wee fellow's enormous mouth went in search of his ears, as he grinned his appreciation. Winking at Mac as the latter swung out of the saddle, he cried jubilantly:

"Och, McGlusky, where the divil have yez been visitin'?"

"Haud yer blether, an' get me some food tae put inside me whilst A tak' the packs and saddles off these horses an' water them."

Bucky, who knew McGlusky in all his moods, took this speech with the greatest good humour. Walking round the horses, he exclaimed:

"Faith, they're grand bastes, Mac, an' the pack saddles are loaded to the bustin' point."

"The pack saddles are, but A'm not, so sew yer mooth up an' grid me a steak o' venison."

Bucky, who had all an Irishman's love for a good horse, tore himself away from the three fine animals rather reluctantly, and went about his cooking duties, whilst Mac stripped the animals, watered them with discretion, and then led them to the best patch of grass in the vicinity, where he knee-haltered them close to Bucky's pair. Having done this, the big fellow filled his pipe and stood looking at the horses long and critically. The survey seemed to please him, for in between the pulls at his pipe he muttered :

"The three horses the Lord had gied me are all weight-carriers, big-boned and good-blooded. They'll only need twelve hours' rest on guid feed, an' they'll be ready f'r a long trek an' a fast yin. As f'r Bucky's twa beasties, they're top-hole ; the wee Irish bantam has never made a mistake aboot a horse since A've kenned him an' he made nae mistake when he bought this pair."

Having satisfied his own soul in regard to his four-footed friends, Mac lounged back to the camp, drawn thither by the appetizing odour of grilling venison. As he flung himself down by the small fire, Bucky pushed a tin plate towards him, liberally heaped up with grilled deersmeat and fried onions ; a second or two later he added to this dish a pot of steaming coffee, a tin pannikin and a big chunk of fresh camp fire bread. There were many things in this world that Bucky O'Grady could not do, but McGlusky was wont to aver that in all the world there was no camp cook to equal the little man, and Mac was no mean judge, for he was a master cook himself. O'Grady did not spoil a first class performance by interspersing conversation with the process of eating ; he just hung around in silence, now replenishing the empty pannikin, anon hewing off a fresh chunk of camp fire bread from the loaf, and interspersing these actions by refilling the tin pan. He was like a little mother in trousers attending to the wants of a big child. When at last Mac leaned back, burying one elbow in the veldt grass, and searching for his eternal pipe with his free hand, wee Bucky looked into his face with an insinuating smile, and eyes atwinkle.

" Mac ? "

" Weel, ye wee blastie ? "

" Mac, phwat was that Oi heard clashin' in yer saddle-bag when ye dumped it down on the ground ? Ut sounded to me like wan bottle bumpin' against another. Phwat was ut ? "

" Gin, in stone bottles," was the laconic response.

" Holy Moike ! Gin in stone bottles ! Then ut's the best brand brewed in Holland."

Mac grunted acquiescence.

" The brand's a'richt ; it's guid enough for the Kaiser—too dom guid."

" To hell wid the Kaiser, but it's good enough for us Mac, an' shure ye're lookin' sad an' weary wid hard ridin'. Just lay yerself down here, Mac, and I'll make yez a nice soft pillow wid the lump o' rock that's just behint yez, an' whilst ye're takin' yer aise, Oi'll brew yez a drink from wan av thim stone bottles, wid a few cloves an' a bit av sugar an' a drop av boilin' water, that'll make yez a dream-cap that'll set yez dramin' about the prettiest woman ye ever ran against. If I only had a bit av mint to add to the cloves an' the sugar, it'd be two women, an' both av thim princesses ye'd be dramin' about."

Mac waved his hand grandiloquently.

" A'm no a drinkin' mon, Bucky O'Grady, ye ought tae ken that richt weel by this time, but seein' ye've set yer heart upon it, ye can brew me just yin drink, an' yin f'r yersel', an' when ye've done that, ye little unleavened lump o' Irish sin, ye can put the saddle-bags holdin' the bottles unner my heid f'r a pillow, then A'll be dreamin' they'll be safe."

"Do ye mane to say, McGlusky, ye think Oi'd be stealin' yer liquor while ye slept?" Bucky's voice was full of mournful reproach as he voiced this protest. "Ye think Oi'm a thafe—me that's shared bed an' board wid yez, an' fought an' hunted by yer side these years past."

"A thief?" growled McGlusky, "Eef any ither yin but yersel' dared tae tack that name on tae ye, wee mannie, A'd put yin hand unner him an' yin on top o' his head, an' squeeze him sae tight thegither, no air would come intae him or gang oot o' him. A thief—you? Wee mannie, A'd trust you wi' a mountain o' gold; ye're as honest as a sunshiny Sabbath, but I dinna think it's the pairt o' a mate tae put temptation i' the shape o' a bottle o' grog i' a mate's way. Ye ken the cork *micht* come oot o' a bottle o' grog i' the nicht time, an' in yer sleep yer face micht be drawn doon tae the mooth o' the bottle, an', wee mannie, it's on the cards that you an' me may want a' oor sober senses aboot us f'r the next few weeks. The men A borrowed the three horses and the outfit frae may come ridin' hot on oor trail, an' eef they dae, we'll need clear heads an' clear eyes tae mak' a guid getaway. Noo A've tellt ye a' aboot it, brew me a dream-cap, an' brew yin f'r yersel', an' we'll drink death an' damnation tae them that may come in search o' us, f'r, Bucky, ma mate, some o' them were i' the gang that beat ye up an' robbed ye when ye were unner the influence o' Cape brandy an' wumman."

When these words reached his ears, Bucky leapt joyously to his feet. Swiftly he brewed the two drinks, and when the liquid was ready, he raised his pannikin and prayed the prayer of the strong men of the wilds:

"Here's luck to yez, McGlusky, me mate, an' may the saints send the gang ye borrowed the horses from hot on yer trail. Now drink an' sleep, an' while you sleep, Oi'll clean our rifles."

"Ye revengefu' wee deil," muttered Mac, as he sipped his dream-cap, licking his lips unctiously. "You Irish are maistly pagans an inch frae the surface. Is it no' written that a mon should turn his ither cheek tae the smiter, an' deal kindly wi' them tha' despitefully use him? Put all thochts o' vengeance oot o' yer mind, ye wee blastie, but when ye've cleaned an' reloaded ma rifle, lay it handy tae ma side, an' eef ye hear horses galloping oor way during the nicht, just gie me a cry. A can shoot dom near as straight by sound as A can by sight."

CHAPTER IV

THE WILES OF MCGLUSKY

THE small grey grass birds, earliest risers of all living things upon the veldt, had scarcely taken their heads from under their wings and chirped their cheeky greetings to all surrounding things, ere McGlusky rose from the hard earth, and, yawning, stretched himself mightily, like a lion preparing for a day of foray or feud. Slight as the noise was that he made it awakened Bucky O'Grady. Stealthily but swiftly the little man rolled over, picked up his gun, and rose to his feet.

" Phwat is ut, Mac ? Did yez hear horses comin' our way ? "

" Wouldn't A be shootin' at 'em eef A did ? " grumbled McGlusky. " A heard nothing, wee mannie, but it's time tae be afoot. You get breakfast, but dinna mak' a fire i' the open ; dig a hole an' build yin in the lee o' yon rock, an' dinna mak' it any bigger than the blunt end o' a baby, an' when y've done yer cookin', tread it oot. A'll awa' an' hae a look at the horses." He tucked his rifle negligently in the hollow of his arm as he spoke. Just as he was about to move off, he added : " Keep yer artillery wi'in reach o' yer hand frae noo on, ye wee sinner, f'r the gang who may come in search o' us are the scum o' the earth. They foregathered here in Africa i' the hope o' makin' easy money, an' makin' it quick, an' they'll nae be particular hoo they mak' it. There's yin big square-heid amang them they ca' Von Videlheim : A was sair tempted tae put a wee bittie o' lead i' the middle o' his wame when A saw him sittin' by the camp fire when A surprised the gang, an' ordered them tae throw their hands up, but it went against ma conscience tae plug an unarmed mon, but eef he'd reached f'r his rifle when A gied the bunch o' them the order tae throw their han's up, A would hae sent that blastie tae the place that's waitin' f'r him, but he didna', he just rose up like the ithers, an' held his han's high, an' when A gied them the order tae march, he marched wi' the rest. A'm no' thinkin' he's afraid, f r he's no' a cooard, but he kens weel when he hasn'a a dog's chance ; he'll fecht when he's got a fechtin' chance, an' when there's naething f'r it, but tae rin, why he'll rin, an' wait his chance tae get even later. Yon big black horse that A brought intae camp carryin' a pack was Von Videlheim's ridin' hack, an' the beastie maun hae cost him a pot o' money, eef he didna' steal it. Eef that square-heid can get a few good veldtsmen tae follow him, he'll be on oor trail. A ken him weel ; A crossed his tracks in China an' in Australia an' South America, an' mony anither pairt o' the world. He has mair crimes on his soul than ye could cram intae twa chapters o' the book o' doom. He has stolen diamon' mines, an' gold an' silver mines, an' robbed banks, an' shed blood i' the four quarters o' the world. He's no' the mon tae sit doon quietly unner the indignity A put upon him when A looted his horse an' drove him oot o' his camp like a coyote on the run."

Bucky O'Grady had been listening with great intentness to his comrade's impressive discourse, and when the big man had finished, Buck said :

" Be the sinful soul av me, Mac, it was the big fellow you call Von Videlheim who was the leader av the lousy gang that doped me drink an' beat me up an' got away wid me papers. O'im shure ut's the same divil, because before Oi was too dhrunk to tell hay from hen feed, Oi heard the others callin' the big blighter 'Von.' A grand figure av a man he was too, standin' in his spurred boots somewhere gettin' on for six foot six, wid shoulders on him loike a workin' steer, an' a face loike ye see in picture books. Oi wish Oi'd had yer chance, McGlusky, when yez saw him sittin' ferninst his camp fire near the thrack. Oi'd have druv the second button on his jacket through his liver wid a bullet. Ut was him, Mac, who druv the toe av his boot into my face, an' split me cheekbone open in the shebeen when Oi was tryin' to claw the papers out av his hands that he had stolen from me. Be the saints, Mac, if Oi was shure he'd come lookin' for us, Oi'd camp right here, an' lay waitin' for the big divil, wid me rifle-barrel restin' on a rock."

The Irishman's voice had risen almost to a scream at the memory of his wrongs, and his frame shook with the frenzy of his rage.

"Ye'll dae naething o' the kind, wee mannie," rumbled McGlusky. "Ye'll leave that big squareheid tae me, Jamie McGlusky. It's mony a long year A've wished tae measure masel' wi' yon blastie mon tae mon, no' wi' lead or wi' steel, but just naked hands tae naked hands, each mon makin' his ain rules as he goes along. A'm nae a brutal mon by instinct, as ye ken weel, Bucky, but it wad be a joy tae me tae come tae grips wi' Von Videlheim, just naked flesh tae naked flesh. He's been swashbucklin' aboot the worrld, braggin', that nae mon could stand toe tae toe wi' him an' best him."

"He's sixty pounds heavier than ye are, Mac, an' he has the luck av the divil, if all Oi heard av him is true."

"Iphm—sixty poonds—weel, tha's a lot o' weight tae gie awa', but A'm nae lily flower, an' wha' there is o' me is bane an' sinew, an' inside o' ma carcass is the Anzac speerit, an' a true Anzac wad fecht a rattle-snake bite f'r bite. It's naethin' tae boast o', it's just i' the breed. A'm theenkin' it will be a scrap worth watchin' when Jamie McGlusky an' Von Videlheim meet."

"Ut will that," chortled the little Irishman, "an' if Oi'm trainin' yez, Mac, Oi'll singe them whiskers off wid a fire-stick, for if Von Fiddlestick, or whatever the divil's name is, gets his claws in them hairy curtains ye wear on yer face, he'll pull one side av yer head nor'-east an' the other sou'-west. Phwat hales me Mac, is how Von Viddelhammer came ter be wid the gang yew found on the trail. He ought to be on the diamond field seein' it was him who stole the papers."

"He's been oot an' staked a claim Buck, an' has been in for stores an tools. A'weel, cut oot the talkin', an' get on wi' the grub, an' A'll awa' tae the horses."

After breakfast, whilst Bucky was packing everything that was essential, and discarding all that he considered superfluous of their belongings, McGlusky was busy fashioning with his long, razor-edge hunting-knife horse-hoof pads out of deer hide. When he had got sufficient of these for the horses, one for each hoof, he split several other deer hides into long narrow thongs.

"Phwat's thim for?" demanded Buck, looking up from his work.

"Bootlaces for the horses," was Mac's laconic response.

When everything was ready, the two riding horses saddled and bridled, and the pack horses well and carefully laden, Mac began to do what he termed, put boots on the horses. Carefully padding squares of canvas with grass, he bound up each horse's hoofs, and when this was done, he covered each poultice-like attachment with deerhide, lacing the deerskin to the horse's legs. Then he led each horse slowly and carefully away from the camp on to the rocky kopje. The animals were clumsy at first, and resented the unsightly appendages that had been applied to their hoofs and their legs, but both Mac and Bucky O'Grady were horse-masters, and it was not long before they had the animals moving as though they had determined to make the best of their new and novel conditions. O'Grady was grumbling the whole time the march continued along the rocky heights which they were traversing, but for a long time Mac took no heed of his companion's complainings, but at last his impatience, which was not of the inexhaustible kind, wore threadbare.

"Stop bleatin'," he snarled in reply to some unusually caustic remark of the Irishman's. "A ken weel wha A'm daein'."

"Och, ye hairy image," snapped Bucky. "A wan-eyed grass-hopper could tell what ye are afther. Ye're coverin' our thracks, so that Von Didelheim and his party will be moidered wid doubt as to which way we went when we left our camp. Divil a taste av a thrail have the horses left behind them since we left the spring; a flock of buzzards couldn't have travelled and left less av a thrail than we have."

McGlusky screwed himself round in his saddle and, looking not unkindly at his companion, remarked:

"Bucky O'Grady, there are times when the good God gies ye a wee bittie o' common sense, an' this is yin o' them. A've blinded oor tracks by maskin' the horses' hoofs an' travellin' f'r best pairt o' a day on bare rock that's as hard as flint. When we reach the elbow i' the hills ye can see aboot a mile ahead o' ye, we'll go doon off the hills on tae the level ground, an' steer oor horses richt intae the eye o' the settin' sun. At this time o' the year horses wi' masked hoofs will mak' but a sma' trail on the sun-baked plains, an' eef we travel far an' travel fast, movin' in single file, we'll get such a start that A'm thinkin' we'll reach country A hae heard of long before those in pursuit o' us will come in touch."

"Ye mane," snapped the Irishman, "ye're shy o' a rifle fight wid the big square-head an' his gang?"

McGlusky smiled indulgently.

"A'm a mon o' peace, O'Grady, when A can get it, an' A'm goin' tae get it in this time, eef the Lord is guid tae his servant."

"Bedad, Oi never thought ye had a yellow streak in yez, Mac."

McGlusky raised his eyes in surprised fashion at this taunt.

"Weel, weel, think me cooard eef ye like, but A'm no callin' it cooardice ma ainsel' f'r twa men tae rin frae twenty."

"We could take cover an' have a chance wid twenty, couldn't we, in such country as this?"

McGlusky swept his arm out in the direction of the plains.

"We could tak' cover, especially yersel', ye Irish mannikin, but whaur is the cover f'r oor horses, an' the first thing the pursuers wad dae wad be tae shoot oor animals. Whaur wad ye be then, ye straw-heided little beast? Stranded an' on foot on the African veldt, wi' mounted men chivvyin' us frae dawn till dark. Yer blood's tae hot when there's a fecht hangin' roond; ye're tae Irish, that's what's the matter wi' ye; the Irish mak' gran' soldiers, wee Bucky, but bad leaders. It's guid f'r ye this day that ye've got a Scotch Australian tae dae yer thinkin' f'r ye. Ye dae the followin' an' A'll dae the thinkin'. Ut's nae cooardice, but strategy, an' strategy is common sense wi' the trimmin's off."

"All right, McGlusky; ye call ut strategy—Von Videlheim will call ut cold feet, an' you an' me a pair av quitters."

"Let him," purred the big man. "When A was back in oor camp plannin' tae ride a blind trail, A put masel' i' that big buccaneer's place, an' tried tae think just as he wad think. He'd be cocksure o' gettin' me an' anyone who might be wi' me when he started in pursuit wi' twenty or mair scallywags weel mounted an' armed, an' the toughs ridin' wi' him wad be quite content wi' their job, but when they got tae oor camp, an' they'd be sure tae dae that, they'd cast aboot tae find oor trail, an' A'm theenkin' they'd no' find it. Wha' dae ye think Von Videlheim wad dae then, Bucky ? "

" Och, if he had the sense av a love-sick duck, he'd break his men up into little parties, an' send 'em circlin' about, seekin' our thracks."

" Ye hae got a wee bit brains unner yer hat, O'Grady," answered McGlusky patronisingly, " though ye dinna often use the gift the gods gied ye. Ye've just hit on wha' A thocht masel' Von Videlheim wad dae. Noo tell me wha' dae ye think the bunch o' blackguards wi' him wad dae when time passed, an' they becam' ma'r an' mair mystified by findin' nae sign o' the way we had travelled ? "

The little man scratched his head and frowned perplexedly.

" How in blazes do Oi know phwat they'd do ? " he flung out angrily. " Do yez take me for a moind reader ? "

" Nae, nae," purred Mac, " ye couldna' read wha' ye niver possessed, but mind-readin', as ye ca' it, is a gift a' born leaders o' men, like Mahomet, Napoleon, Alexander the Great an' Jamie McGlusky, are gifted wi'. Noo A'll tell ye wha' those scallywags will dae. As time passes they'll begin tae think o' the fortunes that are bein' made on the diamon' fields that were stolen frae you an' me, an' they'll be cussin' themselves f'r throwin' awa' their chances o' gettin' a share i' the loot, just f'r the pleasure o' followin' a wild harum-scarum deil's spawn like Von Videlheim in search o' revenge, an' yin by yin or in pairs, they'll slip awa' frae him, an' ride off on their ain business, until he'll hae but yin or twa o' the mair foolish or mair determined scallywags bidin' wi' him. Dae ye get that, ma wee mannie ? "

" Faith an' Oi do," exclaimed O'Grady admiringly.

" Iphm—A'm glad ye've got it, Bucky. There's sae little o' natural gifts i' yer heid, tha' there's plenty o' room f'r the wisdom A can pump intae it."

O'Grady took his chastisement as though he liked it, for he had received so many samples in the past of Mac's uncanny powers of analysis that he had come to think his big partner almost infallible.

" Bedad, ut sounds loike somethin' out av a book, Mac. Now tell me, will Von Videlheim quit the job an' go afther his men to the diamond fields ? "

" No," rasped Mac, " the big square-heid loves money, an' he always gets it an' always spends it like a buccaneer wi' scarlet wummen an' gamblin' an' drinkin'. When his pooch is fu', he tak's the lid off hell, an' wallows up tae his neck i' the ashes, but he's a blood-luster, an' he'll follow the blood-thirst, an' what's mair, he has the vanity o' a pink peacock, an' none ken better than he hoo the gibes wad pass aroond frae mooth tae mooth i' the big new camp, concernin' hoo he an' his gang o' heelers were tricked an' chased oot o' their camp by yin mon. The niggers will tell that story, an' paint it blue i' the tellin', an' it'll grow richer in colour frae the tongues o' a' the whites who repeat it. Von Videlheim's vanity wadn'a let him gang back an' face a thing like that. Nae, nae, Bucky O'Grady ; blood-lust and vanity will keep him on oor trail, an' by an' by "—McGlusky paused, dropped his reins, and reached out his big hands, his fingers twitching like talons—" By an' by A'll get him. A ken a story o' a lassie, sweet as the dawn, winsome as a flower breakin' frae the bud, tha' this spawn o' sin blighted, broke an' ruined. God forget me eef A forgie him when my hands close roond his gullet; A'll pu' his windpipe up frae his innards as a well-sinker pu's a rope frae a well."

"Och, but ye are a good hater, Mac."

"Why wad A no' be?"

"Ut's not meself that's sayin' ye shouldn't be, but when ye have wan av yer religious fits on yez, ye quote Scripture like wather comin' out av a cloud, to prove ut's love an' gentleness an' not force that rules the world."

"There's a time for a' things, wee mannie," answered Mac sententiously, "an' besides, it's nae me ain wrongs A'm thinkin' aboot when A'm talkin' o' Von Videlheim; it's the wrongs o' a wumman."

O'Grady was grinning behind his hands, for the impish Irishman loved nothing better than to have sly digs at his big mate's idiosyncrasies.

"If iver Oi get howld av the big square-head," murmured the little man, "an' him nice an' dhrunk, as Oi was when he kicked me in the face, ut won't be av any woman's throubles Oi'll be dramin' about. Oi'll just remember the clash av his spurred heel in the face av me."

"Maybe," purred Mac, "A'll be givin' that little matter some o' ma conseederation when A come tae grups wi' him—no' that A think ye've much tae complain about the noo, O'Grady; ye are no much worse off i' the way o' looks since A stitched ye up wi' twine an' ma packin' needle. Eef anything," he added, after gazing intently into the Irishman's face, "I should say ye were a bit mair distinguished-lookin'."

What O'Grady might have replied to this expression of opinion no man knows, for at that moment, topping a little hillock on the veldt, the pair of wanderers found themselves looking down into a shallow basin in the centre of which a pool of clear water gleamed radiantly.

"Water! Bedad, our luck's in, McGlusky."

"Luck?" McGlusky almost stormed out the word. "Tae hell wi' ye an' your faith in luck, ye Irish omadhown. Accordin' tae ye an' yer shallow way o' thinkin' everything that happens is luck, guid or bad."

"Well, an' phwat else it ut, tae find wather waitin' for us loike this? Oi don't know this bit av counthry, neither do ye. Phwat else but luck could make us walk right on top av ut?"

"There's a Pooer ye ken naethin' aboot, ye pagan, a Pooer that guides a man when he's bent on a righteous cause, an' it's that Pooer that has led you an' me tae this pond, like blind ducklin's."

"Is ut?" chortled Bucky. "An' if Von Videlheim an' his friends find this same pool, phwat will ye call that, McGlusky?"

"You wait an' see," snarled Mac, standing in his stirrups, and surveying the surrounding country with all his hunter's instincts in his eyes.

The horses, scenting the water, and being severely athirst from their long and fast journey, were straining to get to the pool, and Buck O'Grady was about to advance, when McGlusky checked him.

"Ger oot o' yer saddle, little man, an' haud the beasties, whilst A bring water tae them until they've had a bellyful; then we'll turn them loose, for the grass is guid hereaboots; an' let 'em eat their fill."

"Why go to the throuble, when we can lead the horses to the wather?"

"Because, ye wee bun-head, the first thing Von Videlheim will dae eef he gets tae this water-hole will be tae walk roon' the edges o' it tae search f'r the tracks o' horses."

"O'im sick av duckin' away from that big square-head," snarled O'Grady. "Let's take our horses well out on to the veldt after we have watered them, an' *cache* them, an' then come back an' plant ourselves.

There's plenty av little hollows round about that will hide a man, an' two men who know how to use their guns could play the divil an' all wid a strong party that they took by surprise."

McGlusky treated this outburst as though it had come from the lips of a petulant child.

"Haud the horses," he commanded, "an' haud yer mooth thegither at the same time. A'm nae sayin' ye're a village idiot, but ye're such an a'michty guid imitation o' yin that ye micht easily be taken f'r the real thing."

Seating himself on the thick grass, the big fellow quickly removed his gaiters and boots, then taking two prospector's buckets that were hanging on the pack, he marched down to the pond, and soon returned with two buckets full of water, and this manœuvre he repeated until the horses had thoroughly satisfied their thirst. When this was accomplished, he spoke again abruptly to his mate.

"Noo the beasties will eat in comfort, so tak' them weel awa' frae the pool, an' knee-halter them i' the best patch o' grass ye can find. By the time ye have off saddled them A'll be wi' ye. Here, tak' ma boots an' gaiters, an' stuff them i' the pack."

"In the name of Moike," exploded O'Grady, "what are yez runnin' about loike a barefooted gossoon for, ye'r no grasshopper?"

"A'm goin' tae walk aroon' the pool tae look f'r the spoor o' game. A'll ken in ten minutes wha' kind o' animals come here tae drink. A've got a plan i' ma heid f'r doin' Von Videlheim an' his blackguards a little bit o' kindness, should they come this way."

"Phwat's that got to do wid yez goin' about barefooted, Mac?"

The big man, looking down from his superior height, eyed his diminutive companion rather pityingly.

"Ye're no' a descendant o' Solomon, Bucky

O'Grady, or if ye are, ye were born on the wrang side o' the blanket. A'm goin' barefooted because A dinna want tae leave the trail o' boots ; eef A did tha', Von Videlheim wad be walkin' on his toes wi' his ears pricked like a fox, as soon as he saw ma trail, f'r his mither didn'a bring a saftie intae the worl' eef yer ain did—no' tha' A'm meanin' any disrespec' tae yer intellect, Bucky, though A'm thinkin' ye couldn'a count up tae five on yer fingers unless ye tied a bit string on each stump as ye went along, tae mak' sure ye didn'a get lost i' the mazes o' yer artithmetic."

As Bucky moved away with the horses, Mac called after him :

" Dinna light a fire, wee mannie. We must sup on raw biltong an' a bit biscuit the nicht, an' wash it doon wi' a drop o' water frae the pond yonder."

Whilst the Irishman was attending to the horses, McGlusky carefully circled the pool, and when he joined O'Grady there was a well-satisfied expression upon his face.

"Ma plan will work all right," he vouchsafed as he threw his long length down and rested his head upon the pack for a pillow.

" Och, you an' your plans. Phwat's under yer hair, Mac ? "

" Just a wee drappie o' the milk o' human kindness f'r Von Videlheim an' whoever may be wi' him, that's a'."

O'Grady snorted disgustedly, and handed out the biltong.

" Ate that," he said snappingly. " An' when the mate has squazed some av the conceit out av yez, perhaps ye'll be tellin' me phwat yer precious plan is."

Mac smiled indulgently, as he noticed how the little man's temper was ruffled by his reticence, so when the frugal meal of raw biltong and biscuits had been disposed of, and O'Grady produced two pannikins of water, Mac slyly drew forth a stone bottle of gin and, uncorking it, emptied half the water out of O'Grady's pannikin and filled it with the more heartsome liquor.

"There, ye ill-tempered wee wisp, tha's pairt o' ma plan," he chuckled.

"Is ut?" grinned O'Grady. "Then if the rest is as good, Oi'll be in on my share av ut."

Mac treated himself as he had treated his partner, and a few minutes of rapturous silence intervened. When the pannikins were empty, O'Grady produced his pipe, but Mac laid one heavy hand gently on the Irishman's wrist.

"Dinna light up, matie; the sun's weel doon, an' the night drawin' on us, an' at this hour every wisp o' scent will tell a tale on the breeze, for a' wild animals depend mair on their pooer o' smell than on eyes or ears directly the daylight fades; ye ken that as weel as A dae masel'."

"Every veldt kid, black or white, knows that, Mac, but we don't want game; we've got enough biltong to last us for weeks, an' we couldn' pack more if we had ut."

"Ye're richt both ways, Bucky."

"Well, why shouldn't Oi smoke? Ther's not likely to be lions hereabouts."

"A'm no sae sure o' that, though A didna' see the spoor o' a leeon by the pond, but this is ma plan. In a wee while we'll see plenty o' big game by the water yon'er, an' we'll drop as mony o' them as we can wi' oor rifles. Later on we'll get a few o' the mangy coyotes that will come tae batten on the game we've shot."

"Be the sinful soul of me, Mac, an' why would we be wastin' good cartridges on coyotes or hyenas, or any such divil's breed?"

"A'll tell ye, wee mannie. We'll shoot wha' we can the nicht, an' in the mornin' when we've watered oorsel's an' oor horses at the pond, we'll rip open coyotes, hyenas an' any ither game we get, an' carefully an' wi' lovin' kindness we'll put the carcasses intae the pond, after we've weighted the carcasses doon wi' stanes. In twa days in such weather as we're havin' noo, wi' the sun blazin' hot frae six i' the morn till eight in' the evenin', the water i' that pond will be sae tasty nae horse wud put its muzzle near it, an' nae man who wasn'a daft wad drink it, so eef Von Videlheim gets on oor trail, as he's sure tae dae in the end eef he has any nigger hunters wi' him, he an' his gang will no' hae a chance tae refresh themselves here as you an' A an' oor horses are daein', an' eef a big bunch o' scallywags follow him this far, they'll no follow him any further. In any case it will gie us time tae pick an' choose our route. Noo tuck yer head unner yer wing an' get a wee bit sleep, an' A'll keep the first watch. We maunna trust tae the luck ye're sae often talkin' aboot, Bucky; Von Videlheim may blunder on oor tracks right off the reel, especially if he happens tae hae a Zulu hunter wi' his outfit, an' ye can bet yer sweet life on this, ma mate: eef that gang come upon us sleepin', we'll neither o' us wake again until we wake as cherubims, sae you sleep an' A'll watch, an' you watch an' A'll sleep. Ye'll only hae a cat-nap o' aboot an hoor before the game comes croodin' tae the pond; then A'll wake ye, but an hoor o' sleep isn'a tae be despised on a trail like this."

McGlusky was wrong in regard to the appearance of the game. Possibly in spite of all his precautions, the shy denizens of the wilds sensed in some uncanny manner the presence of hidden danger, for they held aloof until thirst drove them shyly forward. Bucky had been sleeping musically for two good hours ere a light touch of McGlusky's fingers awakened him. The pair of hunters at that close range could make out their quarry very distinctly in the silver radiance cast by the countless millions of stars that dotted the mantle of the skies. They fired simultaneously, and fired and fired again, and after the echoes of those volleys had died away, the stillness of the night fell upon the scene once more.

"A'm thinkin' we've got enough f'r oor needs, ma mate; anyway, we'll hae tae dae wi' wha' we got, f'r nae horned or hoofed animal will come nigh this water f'r many a long hoor. How many shells did ye use, Bucky?"

"Four, an' Oi heard every bit av lead flop into flesh, Mac. How many shells did yez bust?"

"Seven," replied the big fellow unemotionally.

"Och, seven shells! Nearly two to my wan! How in the name of the saints do ye do ut, Mac? Ye shoot wid the speed av rain beatin' on a roof. Two shots to my wan, an' Oi'm no sluggard on the trigger."

"It's a gift, wee mannie, just a gift, naethin' tae mak' a song aboot."

The little bit of excitement incidental to the shooting drove sleep away from the pair, so they sat conversing in low tones of men and places that had come into their adventurous lives under many skies. Suddenly a sound that was pretty nearly akin to the laughter of a maniac, broke the stillness of the night.

"Bedad," whispered O'Grady, "it's wan av them blasted hyanas. Oi never hear wan av them laugh sudden like widout a cold feelin' runnin' down me spine. Oi had a mate wanst in Guatemala, where Oi was gold diggin'. He was a foine feller for worrk, but he'd dhrink a rivir dhry if ut was runnin' wid whisky, an' he used to get delirium trimmins about wanst a year, an' when the jimjams were on him, he used to laugh in the night time loike that hyana did just now."

"A'm nae likin' them masel," muttered Mac.

" Wait a wee bittie till A can see his een, then eef he laughs at wha' A send him, he'll——"

Mac did not finish the sentence, for he saw a pair of eyes gleaming through the night, as the hyena paused to sniff at one of the beasts the hunters had shot. It was only a momentary gleam, like two green lights flashing suddenly into view, but brief as the flash was, it was long enough for McGlusky. He fired, and the lights went out. O'Grady had seen the big fellow shoot on hundreds of occasions, but he never lost his admiration for Mac's uncanny skill with the rifle.

" How in the name av me sainted mother do ye do ut, Mac ? " he gasped. " Ye can't sight yer rifle in the darrk, yet yez never miss."

" Miss ? " grunted McGlusky. " Wha's the use o' carryin' a gun roon' if ye're goin' tae miss when ye use it ? "

" Tell me yer sacret av not missin'," demanded the little man.

McGlusky snorted, as if the demand seemed superfluous to him.

" There's nae secret about it. Ye could dae it yersel' eef ye'd ainly think instead o' askin' questions."

" Could Oi ? " gurgled the Irishman. " Oi've been thinkin' about it for years, ever since Oi met yez, an' Oi'm no wiser this minute than Oi was the first night Oi saw yez shoot in the dark."

" Tha' doesn'a account f'r anything, except tha' ye've michty little tae think wi', Bucky. The next time ye see a thing, just point yer finger at it. It's a million tae yin ye'll point yer finger straight, an' tha's the whole secret o' snap shootin'. Point yer rifle barrel as ye point yer finger, an' then touch yer trigger lightly an' caressingly, as ye'd touch the curl on a wumman's neck. Dae that an' yer bullet will gang whaur ye want it tae gang. Noo try it. There's something tha' looks like a shadow uprearin' itself on the haunch o' the big deer tha's lyin' nearest tae the pond. It's no a shadow, it's a jackal; A can hear the blastie gnashin' its teeth because yin o' its ain kind is slinkin' up on the ither side o' the dead deer."

O'Grady lifted his rifle, and following Mac's advice to point the barrel as he would point his finger and fire, he brought the jackal down, and grew quite excited over the exploit. For a good hour the pair of ambushed men enjoyed the sport of shooting animals they both loathed, then McGlusky growled:

"We've got enough o' the vermin f'r ma purpose, Bucky. A'll sleep noo, an' ye can watch oot an' see tha' oor camp is no' surprised by Von Videlheim's gang. A'm no thinkin' they'll get here till this time to-morrow nicht, even eef they hae the best o' luck, but only fools take chances. Wake me eef ye want me, an' dinna fire ony mair at hyenas or jackals. Let them foul the carcasses o' the beasties we've shot; the mair they foul them, the sooner they'll rot."

Almost before he had ceased speaking he was snoring, and as there was no longer any need or any cause why O'Grady should not burn tobacco, the Irishman lit his pipe, and tucking his rifle under his arm, sauntered off to have a look at the horses. Having found them peacefully feeding, he made a circuit of the spot where McGlusky lay sleeping, all the time keeping his eyes and ears open, but nothing disturbed him during his vigil. In this way the hours passed, until sleep began to lie heavily upon his eyelids; then he awakened his big partner, who instantly took up the watch until dawn broke.

As soon as breakfast was over and the horses watered and laden, McGlusky remarked:

"Noo tak' yer boots off, an' bear a hand wi' the carcasses yon'er."

Quickly the two strong men—for Bucky O'Grady, though small, was a bunch of muscle and sinew—

pitched the shambled game into the pond, then McGlusky, with a skill born of residence amongst many wild tribes of red and black and brown men, set about obliterating the traces of the previous night's slaughter. When he had finished his work, he put a query to his partner.

"Wha' does it look like tae ye the noo, wee mannie ?"

The Irishman twisted his head perkily on one side, and critically surveyed the scene.

"H'm." That was all he said for a little while, as he stood holding his chin in the grip of his left hand. At last he delivered his judgment. "If Oi was to come roidin' in here, Mac, knowin' nothin' av phwat had happened, Oi'd be afther thinkin' that a mob av jackals had been havin' wan hell av a scrap wid some hoofed beasts here be the water's edge."

"That's just wha' A want Von Videlheim' an' his gang tae think eef they come here," purred McGlusky. "Maybe some o' them will get a pint or twa o' the water inside themsel's before they discover the rotting carcasses unner the surface. Eef they dae, their stomachs wull need pumpin' oot before they tak' the trail again."

"Ye mane," gasped O'Grady, "ye are goin' to give Videlheim's gang veldt cholera. Bedad, Oi didn't think ye would do a thing loike that. Tell me, Mac, phwat becomes av yer religion when ye take the warpath ?"

Mac raised his eyebrows in mild surprise at this outburst.

"Wha's wrang wi' ma methods ? A'm no' makin' Von Videlheim's gang drink the water, am A ? They can tak' it or leave it—it's up tae them. We're twa, an' they'll maybe be five an' twenty. Wha' mercy wad they show us eef they got us between the deil an' a door post ?"

O'Grady still looked somewhat unconvinced by his big partner's logic.

"By the whiskers av the prophet Jeremiah, Oi didn't think the Scotch were built loike that, Mac."

"Did ye no?" exclaimed McGlusky, thrusting his hairy chin well forward. "Weel, ma mannie, let me tell ye the hame-bred Scotch mayn'a be, but A'm Scotch Australian. A mair peace-lovin' breed than the Australians doesn'a live unner the arch o' heaven, but when they war, they war a' the way, an' dinna wear kid gloves i' the daein' o' it. Maybe ye'll live tae see the time when a foreign foe will invade the land unner the Southern Cross, an' eef tha' happens, as weel it may, the invaders tha' tread on tha' soil will learn tha' the Australians will use everything tha' comes frae heaven above or hell below, or the earth an' air in between, tae mak' things unchancy f'r their enemies. Fire, flood, an' famine wull a' be pairt o' their war repertoire. They believe, an' A believe, tha' war is hell, an' the mair like hell ye mak' it, the sooner ye get it ower. A'm thinkin'," he added with an unctious smirk, "the Lord put this water i' ma han's as an instrument f'r ma use, an' A wouldn'a be sae ungratefu' tae the Laird o' Hosts as no' tae use His gifts. A'd no' dae anything, ye ken, tae lead Von Videlheim an' his rough necks up tae this water, but A'm dommed eef A'll dae anything tae steer him an' his gang awa' frae it. He's a sinfu' mon, an' sae are those who foregather wi' him. Was the big squareheid no workin' hand in glove wi' those who jumped oor claims an' stole oor diamon's, Bucky? Eef they drink the hyena syrup we've prepared f'r them, it will ainly be a visitation o' the judgment o' the Lord on them f'r their crimes an' their greed. A hate a greedy mon, O'Grady, when he wants wha' belongs tae me. Noo get intae the saddle, an' we'll ride wide o' the pond, an' the rest is in the han's o' Him who kens even when it's time f'r a sparrow tae fa'."

When once they were on horseback, Mac rode to a piece of rising ground, and took his bearings, then sat cogitating deeply, whilst the Irishman watched him, much as a collie dog watches a shepherd. At length Mac spoke curtly and to the point.

"A'm no knowin' wha' lies richt in front, but A've a hunch tha' there's somethin' worth findin' oot straight across country, an' it's across country A'm goin' tae steer. We may find water, or we may not. Eef we dae, a' will be well wi' us, f'r whaur there's water there's game. Eef we dinna find water—weel, ma mate, ye ken the end o' the matter. We've risked the same thing before mony a time an' aft, an' we'll risk it again; we're trail-blazers. Dismount noo, an' we'll tak' the paddin' off oor horses' hoofs, an' we'll ride far an' ride fast, wi' yin eye i' the back o' oor heids an' yin in front, an' we'll tak' wha's waitin' on the lap o' the gods f'r us."

McGlusky's peculiar simile in regard to the disposal of his own and his comrade's eyes tickled O'Grady's Irish sense of humour, and he was chuckling all the time he was removing the padding from his horse's hoofs.

"Wha's bubblin' inside ye, ma man?" queried Mac.

"Och, Oi was only thinkin'."

"Dinna try it," snarled Mac. "Ye're tae auld tae begin anythin' sae unusual."

O'Grady grinned, and threw back a question.

"How are ye goin' to roide wid wan eye in front an' wan at the back av yer head, ye big barbarian?" he demanded.

"Is tha' a' tha's troublin' ye?" cooed Mac. "Weel, ye little blot on the map o' humanity, A'll soon mak' tha' plain tae ye."

With an amazingly quick movement, he had O'Grady by the scruff of his neck in one hand and the seat of his pants in the other, and before the Irishman could gasp out a protest, he was lifted up and put astride his saddle with his eyes looking towards his horse's tail.

"There," said Mac. "Ye'll ride like tha,' an' A'll ride face foremost an' lead your beastie, sae ye can watch the back track we're makin' an' A can watch wha' lies ahead o' us. It's an auld trick, wee mannie, A learned frae the Redskins in Arizona, an' tha's wha' A meant by yin eye in front an' yin at the back o' ma heid."

He chuckled softly as he sprang on to the back of his horse with O'Grady's bridle rein in his hand, and as the pair moved forward, the pack-horses followed as dogs follow a master, and McGlusky steered a course as straight as though a railway surveyor had mapped it out for him. Without running their horses off their legs, the pair of trail-blazers got as much out of them as it was possible to get, and all the time they rode they kept their eyes wide open for game and game trails, for both were wise in veldt lore, and knew that where game abounded water must be plentiful, and where game was scarce, water would be hard to find. During the earlier portions of that day, game signs were many, but towards evening they were both perturbed to notice that such evidence became scarcer and scarcer.

"A'm thinkin'," remarked Mac after a long interval of silence. "we've a druthy country before us, ma mate. A've no seen a livin' thing the last three hoors." A little later he again broke the silence, saying: "Hae ye noticed, Bucky, hoo parched an' dry the grass is becomin'?"

"Oi have that, Mac," answered the Irishman, and then added with a capacious grin: "Ut's the divil's own counthry we've got into. Ut'd be a fine location to send all the teetotallers in the wide wide worrld to."

"Wad it?" answered Mac gruffly. "A'm dommed eef A can follow yer line o' reasonin', O'Grady."

"Shure ut's as plain as the big nose on yer face, Mac. If ye put a colony av teetotallers down here, wouldn't they soon learn to know the value av a drop av blessed liquor? Phwat's wrong wid that for logic, ye bunheaded Scotchman?" and getting no response to his argument, the Irishman pursed up his lips and whistled, and everything he whistled had a merry lilt in it, for it was characteristic of the little son of the Emerald Isle that when things began to look black, he always brightened up, though he would often grouse like a raw recruit when things were going pretty smoothly.

Every mile they proceeded, the country became worse, and Mac's ever observant eyes noticed that the soil under their horses' hoofs became more and more interspersed with sand the further they trekked. The big fellow's brows began to knit together in a frown that showed that the prospects worried him. Without turning his head in his comrade's direction he flung out an order.

"Never mind lookin' on the ground f'r game trails, wee mannie; keep your eyes cocked towards the skies to the right an' left o' ye, an' A'll dae the same in front. It's the birds we maun be watchin' noo; eef there's water aboot at a', they'll be flyin' towards it as the night settles doon."

"Birrds?" chirruped Bucky. "Phwat kind av a birrd, Mac, do ye think would be undacent enough to come to a counthry loike this? Oi haven't seen the flutter av a feather in the bushes for the last foive an' twenty miles."

"A'm no' meanin' wee sma' birds, but aasvogels an' crows."

"Och, them. Oi don't call them birrds, they're divils fastened into feathers."

"Deils or no, watch oot f'r them. They dinna drink much, but eef there's a hatfu' o' surface water lyin' aboot anywhere, they ken o' it."

Both men kept their eyes busy, but all their watching was in vain; they saw nothing between earth and heaven that they could interpret as a sign that water lay anywhere nearby in front of them. At last Mac gave a reluctant order to halt, for the shades of night were gathering round them. Together they stripped the horses, and then Mac doled out about a pint of water for each horse from the canvas bags slung on the packs, then the horses were knee-haltered.

"Halt 'em short," was Mac's order. "Eef ye don't, we'll hae the puir beasties makin' back durin' the nicht f'r the pond we left the morn, unless maybe wi' the gift the horse god has gien them they can smell water hereaboot. Ye cook a bit o' grub, O'Grady an' A'll watch the horses. Eef yin o' them can smell water, he'll mak' f'r it, f'r the beasties are fair druthy, an' this grass is as dry as shavin's in a carpenter's shop. Eef yin o' the horses mak's a break in any direction, A'll gie ye a cry an' A'll follow the beastie. Eef ye hear ma rifle 'spang' three times in rapid succession, ye come on wi' the other three beasties."

"Och, Mac, have a bite to ate first."

"A can dae wi'oot it; a bit hunger wull dae me nae harm, an' wullna hurt me half as much as the look i' ma horse's een when A had tae fob him off wi' a pint o' water after he had carried me a hard day's march i' the blazin' sun. By the whuskers o' Solomon, Bucky the look he gied me hurt me mair than a blow. The puir beastie seemed tae be sayin' tae me wi' his een: 'Ye dommed four-flusher; A thocht ye were a sport.'"

As Mac moved away to take his stand close to his equine pals, O'Grady busying himself about the preparation of a frugal meal was thinking, and he voiced his thoughts, as lonely men so often do.

"Be the soul av me, Oi never understand that big mate av moine. This mornin' when he was preparin' a faver trap for Von Videlheim an' his toughs, he looked as cruel as the grave, an' may the divil's dog bite me if the cruelty av him didn't make me blood run cold, an' to-night the sufferin' o' a horse made his voice shake loike a woman's, an' Oi belave if ut comes to a foight to a finish wid death from thirst, he'll share the last pint av water in his bag wid his horse. Och, Oi give ut up, Oi give ut up. Ut's not for the loikes av yez, Bucky O'Grady, to sit in judgment on Jamie McGlusky; he's not a man at all at all: he's a contradiction in throusers, an' Scotch at that. H-m—Oi'll dhrink his health in a dhrop out av wan av the stone bottles to—er—h—m—save the wather."

All ignorant of his mate's soliloquy, the big fellow was standing near the horses, watching them with every sense alert. The poor brutes had started to nibble at the reddish-grey grass that grew in the arid spot, but they performed this operation perfunctorily, and soon gave up every attempt to eat, and stood listlessly with heads hanging down and drooping quarters. Mac was too old a plainsman not to know that the cooling breezes of the night, snuffed in through their expanding nostrils, would do much to alleviate their pangs of suffering by cooling their overheated insides, but that alone would be a poor substitute for one long, hearty draught of water, however brackish or foul. So he stood watching and waiting. All at once he noticed the horse he had been riding all day began to paw the sandy soil with its free foreleg. No need to tell Mac the reason of such an action on the part of a tired horse. Stepping quietly forward, he untied the rawhide rheim which extended from the horse's halter to just above the knee of its off foreleg;

then with a friendly pat on the animal's sweat-choked neck, and a soothing word or two which no animal appreciated more than a good horse, he set the beast free. The moment he stepped back, the animal went down upon its knees, and rolled over delightedly on its flank. A few seconds later, all its four hoofs were in the air, and it rolled over on to its other flank, stretching and flexing its muscles, and scrubbing its carcass in equine fashion amidst the sand and coarse grass.

" A thocht A'd made nae mistake aboot ye, old son; ye're a game un. Eef ye canna get water, ye'll tak' it oot in a sand bath. A'weel, ye're a leevin' example tae mair than maist men tha' A have met."

At that moment the horse, having enjoyed itself to the full of its capacity under existing circumstances, rose to its feet, and shook itself like a Newfoundland dog coming from a sea bath, uttering a little whinny of satisfaction as it did so.

" Noo," whispered Mac to his own soul, " he'll soon tell me eef there's water anywhere nearby."

As if in answer to McGlusky's prophecy, the horse lifted its fine head, and began questing the air with nostrils that opened and closed like a blacksmith's bellows. Every point of the compass was searched by those sensitive nostrils, then, to Mac's bitter disappointment, the animal dropped its head and began again to nibble at the savourless grass. Something that was not a prayer slipped past McGlusky's lips ; then, as if moved by a sudden thought, he tossed his big head up and turned his angry eyes to the skies, where steel-white stars glinted in myriads from a sky that was unflawed in any direction by a cloud.

" Nae water above us," he growled, " an' nae water lyin' loose on the earth hereaboots. The puir beasties—an' 'twere me tha' brocht them here. By the rope tha' Judas hanged himsel' wi', eef oor horses die the death i' this desert, A'll fill Von Videlheim up wi' gravel stanes, an' shake him until they rattle oot o' him like a sieve."

He had been watching his own particular horse with unconscious intentness all the time he had been communing with himself, and now he noted that the animal, picking perfunctorily at the grass as it moved, was heading straight back along the trail it had come that day, in the direction of the tainted pond.

" A thocht sae, A feared sae ; the beastie kens whaur there is water, an' he's makin' f'r it."

Striking a wide detour, his long legs soon carried him in a half circle sufficiently far to place him in front of the retreating horse, and he soon made it a prisoner again. Leading it back to the other animals, that were straying laboriously in the same direction, he drove them all back to the spot where Buck O'Grady's small camp fire twinkled through the night. Then he knee-haltered his own horse, and knee-haltered it short this time, swearing savagely under his breath all the time he was performing this job. Walking to the camp fire, he said moodily :

" It's a case o' one o' us standing by the horses a' nicht, Bucky; they'll break back the moment they're left alone. Gie me a moothfu' o' grub, an' A'll dae the watchin'."

The Irishman started angrily to his feet.

" Phwat do yez take me for, a mate or a cow ? " he ripped out wrathfully. " We're in this game share an' share aloike. If we find treasure, we'll divide ut fifty fifty, an' we'll share the work an' the throuble too. Sit down an' have yer grub. Oi've had mine, an' Oi'll watch the horses while ye ate."

With a grunt Mac dropped on to the hard earth, and thereby accepted the little man's dictum. They took it turn about, walking round the horses until the night was far spent, then long before the dawn, McGlusky said peremptorily :

"Wha's it tae be, Bucky? Dae ye want tae turn back on oor tracks, whilst we've got a fechtin' chance, or shall we push further on intae the unknown an' risk oor luck?"

"Bedad, McGlusky," snarled the little man, "ye're in wan av yer insultin' moods this noight. Phwat has Bucky O'Grady iver done that yez should think him a quitter an' a cocktail? Whiniver did Oi start ridin' to blaze a new thrail wid me chin turned round on me shoulder, an' the nose av me sniffin' at the back thrail? Go aisy wid yer insults, Mac; Oi'm in this to a dead finish."

"Saddle up then. A've mapped oot a course by the stars an' ma compass, an' we'll travel noo through the cool o' the nicht tae spare the horses."

Soon the animals were laden, each man fixing the halter of a pack animal to the tail of his riding hack, doing this to prevent any straggling in the night, then McGlusky, throwing his bridle rein over his shoulder, trudged off with long, space-devouring strides; Bucky followed in the same fashion right at the heels of McGlusky's pack horse. Each of the horses wore its bell at its neck, for it was a theory of the big Scotch Anzac's that any kind of melody cheered a suffering horse, as the shrill of pipes and the beat of drums will cheer leg-weary troops on a long march. Every now and again Bucky O'Grady, who carried pluck enough in his diminutive figure for a giant, broke into a merry whistle, trying his hardest to make it fit in with the not unmusical jingle of the swaying horsebells; as for McGlusky, he strode in grim silence, his eyes on the stars that were his guiding points. Both men longed desperately for the coming of the dawn, so that they might see what kind of country it was that their adventurous feet were invading. For three hours they travelled rapidly, so fast indeed that O'Grady's short legs were forced to perform a kind of Chinese coolie's trot.

Then the veil of night rolled itself up, and disappeared into its eternal mystery, and another day was born.

" Phew ! "

This world-old exclamation forced its way through the Irishman's lips when his eyes disclosed the nature of the country that surrounded them. Mac heard the startled exclamation, and halting his horse, he came back with a few long strides, until he was face to face with the little man.

" It's a spinifex desert, an' we're in it up tae oor hocks. Eef we gang on, we may be in it up tae oor ears. God kens hoo wide it is."

Then he looked at the horses, and something that was half a groan and half a curse broke from his cast-iron mouth. The animals had let their heads droop dejectedly, and were sniffing at the mixture of sand and gravel that had not the faintest trace of early morning dew upon it.

" There's nae water, Bucky, an' dom little grass, just branches o' spinifex dotted aboot here an' there, though wha' guid they are tae man or beast, God kens—A don't." Dropping one hand on the little fellow's shoulder, the big man said : " Wha' dae ye think aboot it, Bucky ? "

" Ye are doin' the thinkin', Oi'm doin' the obeyin', but if yez ask me, Oi'd say go on till we dhrop or find a better patch than that we're standin' in. There's nothin' here but lizards, an' not enough av thim to make a crowd."

For two hours more the little cavalcade plodded on, and by this time the sun was pouring down in its early morning fierceness. It was Mac who gave the signal to halt.

" There's a wee bittie mair grass hereabouts, ma mate," he said crisply, " an' wha' there is o' it doesna seem quite sae burnt up an' lifeless. We'll ootspan, an' gie each o' the horses a pint o' water."

When the saddles and packs were removed, Mac took off his soft felt hat, and, holding it by the brim in both hands, held it out for Bucky to measure carefully each horse's allotted portion. With wonderous patience and kindness, the big fellow gave to each half-famished animal its scanty portion, then without troubling to knee-halter them, he turned the horses loose.

" They'll no ramble far, Bucky," he growled. " They ken we've a wee drappie o' water i' oor canvas saddle bags, an' they'll no roam far frae that. They're trustin' us tae see them through."

The two men drank sparingly themselves, Bucky making just enough tea to wash down the biltong and biscuits. They had just lighted their pipes, and were preparing to have a much-needed rest, with their backs propped against the packs, when O'Grady, happening to turn his eyes in the direction of the rising sun, saw that Mac's horse was moving away from its companions with something of eagerness in its long walking stride.

" Look at yer horse, Mac. Where is ut makin' to ? Ut's not on the back trail."

The big man gave one quick glance in the direction indicated, and then upreared himself as though moving on springs.

CHAPTER V

TOIL AND DANGER

WHEN Mac saw his horse moving forward with outstretched muzzle, a great hope sprang up in heart. Many a time and oft, when following his dangerous occupation as a pioneer under tropic and sub-tropic skies, he had known horses to pick up the scent of water in almost incredible fashion. To the human nostril water has no scent at all, but all hoofed animals have a form of scent that neither the human nor the monkey tribe possess. The big fellow knew his craft too well to press close up behind his four-footed friend: he got near enough to be on hand if anything of value was discovered, but not so close that any sound he might make could distract the horse, and draw its attention in the slightest degree from the task it had in hand. A very slight wispy breeze was blowing down directly into the nostrils of the travelling quadruped, and Mac noted that the brute was travelling right into the wind. Suddenly the horse halted, and by the way it moved its head from right to left and up and down, Mac knew that it had lost the scent, and he almost held his breath in his anxiety.

"Either the water's a long way awa' in front," he muttered, "or there's only a wee sma' drappie o' it, or the beastie wouldna' lost a scent it had yince picke up."

After pausing for a few minutes, which seem almost an eternity to the watching man, the intelligen animal began to move forward again, but slowly, hesitatingly, as if led only by a silken thread. It had changed its course slightly to the left, and its motions showed that it was not too sure that its instinct was leading it aright. For a good half hour, Mac, moving as stealthily as a wild warrior on a war trail, kept on the track of his four-footed friend. All at once he started, and looked keenly at a little bunch of scraggy bushes that lay just ahead of him, and as he gazed his whole face was aglow, yet he had heard nothing but the tiny chirp of a small bird. To a man new to the wilds such a sound would have conveyed but little, but to McGlusky the trail-blazer it carried a volume of information. If it had been the raucous note of a corbie crow or the savage, grating tones of an aasvogel, Mac's face would not have been alight with such a glow of hope as now gleamed from every feature, for the presence of crows or ravens might not of necessity bespeak the near presence of water, for those strong-winged cleavers of the air could make light of leagues of distance, but the little bush birds had to be near water of some kind, or perish, so the faint chirp he had heard sounded in his ears like a bugle call of hope. Standing quite still he watched the bushes, and ere long his patience was rewarded; a couple of tiny feathered things, scarce bigger than an English wren, fluttered from one bush to another, uttering the tiny calls of their kind. The backs and upper portions of their wings were black; underneath they were silver-grey, and their tails, which were out of all proportion in length to their bodies, were narrow at the base and widespread at the extreme ends. What their scientific names were, Mac had never heard, nor wanted to hear; he had seen thousands of them in his wanderings about Africa, and he had named them "wee wagtails," for though much smaller, they were not unlike the water wagtails of Australia.

"Ye wee pair o' angels o' guid omen," he exclaimed exultingly. "Whaur ye are, there's water o' some kind no' far awa'. Maybe there's only a hatfu' here an' there amang the rocks, but eef there's ainly a saucerfu', ma horse wull fin' it."

The mention of his horse caused him to cast his eyes in the direction where he had last seen the beast, and a startled exclamation broke from him when he failed to see his four-footed guide. Doubling over, so that he could see the hoof-marks on the soil, he sprang forward at a run, for he could follow a trail almost as well as any hound, nor did he pause until he came to a sudden depression in what had seemed to be the level surface of the spinifex desert. This did not surprise him as it would have surprised a tenderfoot ; he knew that such things occurred in nearly all desert plains, though they might appear as flat as a billiard-table. A glance at the hoof-prints told him that his horse at this point had broken into a trot, leg-weary though it was, and Mac at once commenced to race down the long slope. At the lowest point of the basin he could see the horse moving at a rapid walk, with its muzzle right against the soil, but no gleam of water met his eyes. Just before he got to his four-footed companion, the famished creature halted, and began pawing at the soil upon which it stood. Without ceremony the trail-blazer went running right up to the spot, and was greeted with a low whinny that had in it almost a human note. One glance told Mac that water had been there until very recently, for the earth was moist, and the famished brute was mouthing it with its sun-baked lips, but its bloodshot eyes were full of the dumb agony of disappointment. Even in that thrilling moment Mac marvelled at the wondrous power of scent that had enabled the equine prospector to detect traces of the dampness upon the breeze. Putting one of his great shoulders against the horse's chest, Mac by sheer strength forced the creature a pace or so backwards, then, drawing his revolver from its holster at his belt, he fired six shots rapidly into the air.

"There," he growled, "tha' will bring wee Bucky tae me as fast as his legs wull carry him."

The next moment he had stripped himself to his waist, and was down upon his knees, his long hunting knife in his hand, and soon he was hacking at the soil and clawing out the clods he cut with his free hand. At the surface the soil was water-sodden. He had made too many water "soaks" in the Australian wilds not to know this job from A to Z. He worked with fierce energy, but with a method born of experience. Now he was striking with the knife, anon he was reaching both hands down into the hole he was making, clawing and scooping out the soil that was fast turning to mud as the water in the earth, finding its level, began to percolate into the hole. With such savage strength did he engage upon his task, that the sweat poured out of every pore in his skin, but of this he was not aware. Every now and again he had to pause in his labours to strike cruelly with his clenched fist at the muzzle of the now fairly maddened horse which, smelling the water in the mud, threatened to trample upon him as it tried to jam its great head into the hole he was digging. Now and again McGlusky gashed his knuckles against the brute's big teeth, but either he did not feel the pain, or his adamantine will made him ignore it. Once, so fiercely did he strike with his fist, that blood oozed from the animal's nostril.

"A hate tae hae tae dae it," almost bellowed McGlusky, "but dom ye, A maun be cruel tae save ye."

It was just at this juncture that Bucky O'Grady arrived upon the scene.

"Ye've been a hell o' a long time comin'," stormed Mac.

"Och, an' Oi had to be a long toime," retorted

O'Grady. "Oi've had to drag the other horses wid me. They were hangin' round our camp, for they could smell the drop av water we've got left in the pack bags, an' if Oi hadn't brought thim, they'd have ripped the canvas wid their teeth an' spilt phwat they didn't drink. Have yez found a 'soak,' Mac?"

"A'm makin' yin. Get haud o' ma horse an' haud him an' the ithers back. Ye'll hae yer han's fu', wee mannie, but haud them ye must, f'r there's naething tae tie them tae, sae don't waste time trying it; they'd tear up any o' these bushes by the roots as fast as ye could tie them tae them."

Without a word in reply, the Irishman set about the task appointed to him. Somehow he got the horses all round him, each head as close to his own body as he could manage to bring them. The knee-haltering rheims of raw hide, he twisted round their muzzles by means of a running noose, and he wound the slack ends of the rheims round his own two tough hands, and, standing thus, he fought the frenzied creatures with all the strength that was in him. Often he was borne to his knees, and dragged along for a yard or two by the beasts that could now smell the water that was percolating through the soil into the hole that Mac had made, but always the game little beggar struggled up to his feet again, though the raw hide was cutting deeply into his hands and wrists.

When Mac had excavated one hole to a depth as far as his arms would reach, he left it for the water to trickle in, and started upon another hole a dozen yards away from where he had sunk the first. In his second venture fortune favoured him, as it so often favours men who will never admit defeat, for he blundered on to a spot where it was mud right on the surface. When he had scooped as much of this out with his hands as he could, he forced his old soft hat down into the hollow, filled it with mud, and used it in lieu of a dipper.

By the time he had bottomed this hole, and reached rock, water was running in rather freely, and he knew that the horses were going to be saved for that time, for a few pints each of the fluid would work wonders with them. Straightening his back for a moment, he cried:

"Can ye haud the blasties a wee bittie longer, Bucky?"

"They're sufferin' the torments o' the damned."

"A ken tha', but eef ye can haud them while A sink anither hole, an' the water rins intae the first twa', we'll be on top o' oor job. Can ye haud them, mannie?"

Back came the Irish voice, whimsical, in spite of the pain the man was enduring.

"Och, Mac, ut's thim that's houldin' me, Oi'm thinkin'. They've got the raw hide twisted round me hands an' arrms in so many ways, it'll take a juggler to untie me, but Oi'll stick ut or bust."

Something in the little man's voice told Mac that his mate was in a worse plight than his words admitted, and the thought galvanised him into instant action. A spring and a few swift strides took him to O'Grady's side. One glance at the tangle of twisted raw hide and bloody hands and fingers, told him the whole story. He was carrying his hunting knife in his hand, and with a couple of quick slashes he had cut two of the horses free. Gripping them by their halters, he put forth all his leonine strength, and, forcing them backward, he knotted them almost muzzle to muzzle with the remnants of the raw hide rheims.

"Noo untangle yer han's, an' gie me haud o' each beastie as ye free it."

Bucky obeyed with instinctive obedience to the stronger will, and soon Mac had the horses tethered almost nostril to nostril.

"Noo," he said, "awa' wi' ye tae the camp. A'll haud these blasties whiles ye bring a bucket an' a billy can."

With a sigh of unutterable relief, the game little man went off upon his errand, whilst Mac stood soothing the tormented animals as best he could with words of encouragement, aided every now and again by an almost leonine shake of his big hands, as he seized some struggling creature by nostril and underjaw, forcing the rebel to acknowledge man mastery. When O'Grady came back, Mac's order was :

" Fill the bucket an' gie it tae me."

This order was obeyed, and Mac, freeing one of the horses, permitted it to suck in the brackish water with long, deep gulps that meant life to it. Whilst this was going on, the other animals behaved like maniacs, but they were in the hands of men who were horse masters, and at last each of them had received its quota of the fluid, which, though poor enough, must have seemed like nectar to them.

The worst was over now for the time being, but for all that a night of torment lay in front of the two men, for though the worst of the horses' thirst had been quenched, they still hankered for more water, and both Mac and O'Grady knew that if they were left to their own devices, the animals would crowd to the " soaks " and would surely tread them in, in their struggles to get at the fluid. What little sleep the trail-blazers got, they took in cat naps, each rising every few minutes from the vicinity of the water holes to shoo the horses off and put them back on the withered grass again.

" Faith, if the grass was any good at all, at all, the bastes would sthop an' get a belly full av ut, for they're as hungry as toigers, but the blasted stuff has no moisture in ut, ut's as dhry as the whiskers av an ould he-goat," O'Grady remarked a little before dawn.

When the daylight did come, Mac took a look at the three "soaks" and saw that they were all pretty well filled with dark brown water, and he conveyed this information to his mate who was lying face downward on the sandy soil, adding :

"Wee mannie, A think we can noo gie the beasties a bellyfu' an' then they'll sure to start fossickin' roond until they fin' something tae eat, then we can break oor fast an' get a few hoors' solid sleep i' the sunshine."

"Ut's good hearin' phwat ye're tellin' me, Mac, but before the horses swill themselves full av ut, Oi'm goin' to have the biggest dhrink that Oi've had since Oi was half drowned in the Liffey when Oi was a gossoon."

Yawning and stretching himself, Buck O'Grady moved to the nearest and fullest water hole, and dipping his pannikin in it, raised it to his lips and, throwing back his head, he almost emptied the large pannikin down his throat. The next moment he was spluttering and spitting and stamping around like an unbroken stallion, whilst Mac eyed him with amazement.

"Wha's ailin' ye, Bucky ? Is it yer teeth or yer sins ye've swallowed ? "

"Ochone, ochone," spluttered O'Grady, "ut's poisoned Oi am, killt entoirely. Shure this water is as bitter as divil's tears ; ut tastes loike a Christmas dinner that's been mislaid f'r a month."

Without vouchsafing any reply, Mac dropped on his knees by the side of the water hole and, making a double saucer of his hands, he scooped up enough of the dark brown liquid for sampling purposes. This he sucked into his mouth, and let a little trickle down his throat. The next moment he had leapt to his feet, and seizing O'Grady by the nape of his neck like a rabbit, with one hand, he forced open the capacious mouth of his mate with the other. "Noo," he growled, "A'm goin' tae mak' yer

stomach disgorge wha' ye've swallowed, f'r eef ye dinna ye'll be dead wi' dysentery, ye hauf-witted loon, tae gulp wi'oot first tastin', but because A love ye, A'll save ye.”

The next moment he had pushed one hairy finger so far down Bucky O'Grady's throat, that the little man's stomach began instantly to heave, and the desired effect was obtained, for Bucky became violently sick.

“Ye'll dae noo, though eef yer mither was here, A'd be after tellin' her tae tie ye tae her apron strings. Ye've nae mair bush sense than a ween that's bald at baith ends. Lie whaur ye are, while A prepare a bit breakfast, f'r we'll no be able tae camp here, we'll hae tae push on.”

“Mac——”

“Weel?”

“Don't throuble to prepare any breakfast fer me; Oi'll take moine wet out av wan av the stone bottles.”

Mac grunted, but knowing well from a former experience he had had of similar water, just what the Irishman's stomach and palate were like at that moment, he half filled a pannikin with water from one of the canvas bags, and loaded the utensil to the brim with gin. Bucky took a long enduring gulp, and then, looking up into the stony face of his big mate, with something in his eyes that was reminiscent of the eyes of a wire-haired terrier looking into the face of its master, he murmured:

“The divil's me shweetheart, McGlusky, if ye are not a rale Christian to him that's in throuble.”

“Trouble,” growled Mac. “It's ainly a taste av trouble we've had as yet. Ye'll ken wha' real trouble is, Bucky O'Grady, before we've blazed a trail across this spinifex desert. Noo come an' eat.”

The big fellow remained wrapped in gloomy silence throughout the meal, but he ate like a man who knew the value of food in a crisis. When the horses were watered, O'Grady remarked:

"Phwat's the programme, now, Mac? Shall we scout along this valley, you takin' the roight hand an' me takin' the left, an' see if we can foind some swate water?"

For answer the big fellow swung his arm slowly round in a half-circle, indicating all the adjacent country.

"Ye micht as weel search f'r sweet water i' Tophet as search f'r it here, wee mannie. As far as ma een can see, the ainly bushes that are growin' are like these aroond us, an' they're a' bitter aloe bushes. Where they grow, there's nae water fit f'r humans. It's a guid job f'r us that bitter water doesn'a affect 'salted' African horses tae the same extent it daes humans, but it's bad enough f'r the beasties; it pu's the flesh off them till ye can see them shrinkin' inside their hides. They'll be mair like skeletons than horses by the time we get them through this, eef we get them through at a'. As f'r oorsel's, we'll hae tae gang on rations, nae mair than an eggcup fu' o' water three times a day f'r each o' us, an' the sun blazin' doon until the gravel unner oor feet wull blister us through oor veldtschoon. Get a move on ye noo, Bucky, an' bring the horses tae me yin by yin; A'm goin' tae tak' their shoes off."

"Howly heavens, f'r why would yez do that, Mac?"

McGlusky made an impatient gesture.

"Dae wha' A tell ye. A'm tired o' spoon-feedin' ye wi' wisdom. Doesn'a yer ain sense tell ye the heat o' this sand an' gravel we've got tae travel o'er wull mak' iron horse shoes sae hot, we'll hae naethin' but four cripples on oor hands, but eef A tak' off the shoes the natural oil i' the hoof will keep them cool as nature intended."

"Ma sense tells me," retorted the Irishman irascibly, "that if yez take the shoes off, the rocks an' gravel will wear the hoofs down till the frog in each hoof is all they'll be standin' on, begorrah, they'll soon be lame enough then."

"Iphm—a gran' village eediot was lost tae Ireland when ye cam' tae Africa, Bucky. Dinna fash; A'll put the shoes on again when the horses are needin' them."

Quickly but carefully the big trail-blazer removed every shoe from the beasts and, carefully saving every nail, he stowed the lot away in the pack, and a couple of hours later the two men with the horses following them, were trudging forward on their desperate journey.

Day in and day out they stuck to their heart-breaking task, until they and their animals were worn almost to things of skin and bone. They all staggered and stumbled as they walked, and their eyes were bloodshot. Now and again the men came across places where, by clawing in the ground, they could obtain a little bitter water that just enabled the horses to live. At every camp Mac, who had a wonderful fund of knowledge concerning almost everything that grew in the wilds, would go knife in hand in search of roots, which when well chewed would deliver up a certain amount of moisture, and by this means he eked out the scanty supply of water in his canvas bags, but a camping time came when scarcely an egg-cupful could be obtained from the two bags. The two men looked at this precious drop with eyes that were burning in their sockets; then they looked at each other. Slowly a word slipped through Bucky O'Grady's thirst-distorted lips.

"H-e-l-l," he whispered thickly, "ut's the dead finish, Mac."

McGlusky nodded his big head, and his face was grey-white even under the terrific tan with which the sun and desert winds had scorched it.

Suddenly a shadow fell between them, and they both looked up. Poised right above them on wide-spread pinions that kept it motionless, a great vulture floated as though kept in its place by will power alone. A little bitter, cracked laugh came from O'Grady's throat.

"The ondacent divil," he growled. "Shure he's loike a blasted undertaker come ter measure a dyin' man before he's dead. Luk—there's another an' another, a score av thim, be jabers. They've been followin' us all day, Mac, gettin' closer an' closer."

"Followin' us f'r three days; A've been watchin' oot o' the tail o' ma eye, though A didna like tae mention it tae ye, mannie."

"Howly Mary, luk yonder, Mac, there, by thim bushes."

Mac looked, and saw a spotted hyena, a big, gaunt beast that stood a good three feet from the ground to the tip of its shoulder, though its mis-shapen body tailed off until its rump was six inches lower than its shoulder points. A few yards away from this hideous-looking beast skulked a couple of striped hyenas, much smaller, but equally repulsive-looking brutes.

"By the patched pants av Father O'Dowd, him that was the praste in the village where Oi was born, we're suddintly foindin' lots av frinds, McGlusky. Phwat wid the vultures above, an' the hyanas below, we're gettin' too damn popular f'r me enjoyment."

O'Grady managed to screw a little laugh out of himself as he uttered this grim jest in the presence of the sextons in the air above and on the earth around him; then, motioning with his head to the egg-cupful of water which McGlusky still held between one finger and thumb, he said:

"Drink ut, Mac; ut'll wet y'r tongue if ut won't wet y'r troat. If ye divide ut, there won't be enough to wet wan eye apiece."

"Ye game wee blastie." Mac reached out that big hand of his that was free, and let it fall on the Irish shoulder. "Bucky O'Grady, ye ken wha' mateship means. There's no much o' ye, but wha' there is is a' mon, an' he-mon at tha'."

Suddenly his hand slid over to Bucky's shoulder with an indescribably quick movement; fingers and thumb fastened with a steel-like clasp on the little fellow's neck. Under the pressure and by the force of astonishment, O'Grady's mouth opened like the hungry mouth of a nestling bird, and as it gaped wide, McGlusky thrust the egg-cupful of liquid right between the tobacco blackened teeth, and upturned the diminutive vessel and held it there until the last drain had trickled down the throat of the man who at their first meeting had saved him from a horrible death.

"Och, Mac."

That was all O'Grady said when McGlusky set him free, but as he turned his face away, the little man's eyes were full of unbidden tears, for he knew deep down in his soul that not one man in a million would have done what his big mate had done. When he looked around again, the big fellow was away on his eternal quest for roots. Those that he did find had precious little moisture in them, but that little drop was refined from its bitterness by the action of nature, for each root acted as a kind of filter for its own uses, drawing in the water, but rejecting the poisonous matter.

Just before darkness set in, the two mates were sitting grimly silent. They were suffering the torments of the damned, and though they longed for the coming of another day, they dreaded what it might bring forth. All at once the oppressive stillness was broken by the sound of a hideous, horrible, mocking laugh. Both men raised their eyes swiftly in the direction of the sound, and saw the big spotted hyena slinking close by their camp.

"Ye blastie, ye're singin' too soon f'r a sexton," muttered Mac wrathfully, and as the sounds left his throat, his big Colt revolver jerked up from its holster.

Before the crashing noise of its report had fairly reached O'Grady's ears, the big desert scavenger had made one convulsive leap forward, and had fallen in its tracks.

"Oi'm glad ye got that wan," exclaimed the Irishman. "Ut's meself that's not very particular where Oi'm buried, but Oi'd hate to be buried insoide a baste loike that."

Having nothing else to do, the two men rose and, walking to the fallen brute, looked down upon the carcass.

"Yez got him roight through the heart, Mac."

McGlusky nodded affirmatively.

"He'll be breakfast f'r the vultures," he mumbled. "He was a dirty mean skunk, anyway, an' he laughed yince too often. Noo, O'Grady, try an' sleep a bittie."

"Why not sleep a bit yerself, Mac? Ut looks as if we were at the back av beyant, wid not a skillock av hope stickin' out from heaven above or earth below, but sometimes luck changes in the last hour."

"A'm no feelin' like sleep, wee mannie; A wish A was, but ma brain, which ought tae be restin', is workin' overtime. Ye sleep, an' A'll walk roond a bit."

As the big man moved away, O'Grady, though he stumbled from weakness, moved to his mate's side, and clutched his arm. The great gaunt fellow looked down into the appealing face that was turned up towards his own.

"Well, Bucky, wha's bitin' ye?"

A sob broke from the Irishman's lips.

"Ye'll not do ut, Mac; swear to me on the cross ye'll not do ut."

As he spoke, he touched one of the guns in Mac's holster, the same big, death-dealing weapon that had so recently sent the spotted hyena into its own particular hell. Mac caught at the clutching hand, and wrung it.

"A ken y'r meanin', ma mate, but dinna fash: A'd sooner gang west than face forty-eight mair hoors o' this hell, but A'll no' send masel' west across the border; tha' wad be cooardly, an' A'm Anzac bred, a bitter breed tha' is always maist cruel to its own kind, but a breed tha' never brought forth a cooard. A'll nae deceive ye, mannie; A dinna think we've the chance of a worm on a hook, but A'll fecht while there's life in me, an' ye'll dae the same, Bucky O'Grady. Mon, eef A thocht ye'd turn yin o' yer guns on yersel', while A'm awa' on the prowl, A'd rub y'r snub nose i' the dust o' this desert, an' pu' y'r ears ower it like a can'le snuffer. We've lived like men, let us toss a curse i' the teeth o' fate, an' die like men, an' A'm hopin' the vulture tha' mak's a breakfast o' me will think he's eaten the stane tablet o' the Ten Commandments. Eef the blastie can digest them, it's mair than Jamie McGlusky ever could."

So O'Grady crept back and flung himself wearily down with his head against his pack. McGlusky stooped, and picking up a pebble, thrust it in his burning mouth, and turned it over and over again with his tongue that felt like leather. He had been doing the same sort of thing for a week past, coaxing the salivary glands to yield up a little moisture from his own sunbaked body, but on this occasion even this poor solace was denied him; there was no more moisture left in the man. His dried skin seemed to rustle inside his clothes as he moved. As he dragged himself wearily, without any purpose whatever, from one spot to another, his torments increased. From the hips up he had nothing upon him but his coarse grey shirt, a garment he had stolen from the enemy's camp what time he had looted their horses. Seizing the garment in both hands, he rent it asunder all the way down in front, hoping the cool winds of night might ease his parched body. A beautiful moon was riding in the sky, and it came into the rover's mind that never again would he look upon another moon. Strange shapes flitted past him, prowling from one clump of bushes to the shelter of a little rock, and from rocks to other bushes. He saw them, swift and silent though they were, and knew what they were, and what was their mission. The offal-eating hyenas had marked him down for their own, and were only waiting for him to fall, to batten upon what was left of him. Then other shapes, that were not real, began to fasten themselves in the big fellow's brain, pictures of his past life in many lands rose up before him, and sometimes he babbled, but only for a moment or two at a time; his will power forced his brain back into its balance again.

"It's been a long trek," he muttered, "an' a dommed hard trek maist o' the way frae my boyhood tae this hoor i' this desert. A've sinned, an' sinned mair than maist, but——" He threw his ash-grey face up until the gleaming light of the moon enshrined it. "A've sinned, an' A'm dommed eef A regret it, f'r maist o' ma sinnin' was sweet, an' the desire accomplished is as honeycomb tae the soul."

He was sitting on a low rock as he meditated, one of his elbows resting upon a flat-topped boulder that was a little higher than the one on which he was seated.

"This is no' the way A wad hae liked tae han' in ma checks. A'm a peace-lovin' soul, but A wad hae liked tae hae died fechtin', smitin' hard an' dyin' grimly, no' like this, no' like an auld coo." Suddenly he lifted his big arms upwards. and whispered in harsh, grating tones: " God o' ma faithers, gie me somethin' tae grapple wi', gie me a mon's endin'."

He waited for what seemed to him an eternity of time, and no answer came to his gentle plea; no answer ever does come amidst the stern realities of life. The fire within him seemed to flicker out, his big head, grown too heavy for his weary frame to bear, drooped forward until it lay upon the forearm that rested on the boulder. He did not sleep, but the stupor that precedes death settled upon him, and the shadowy, four-footed things that were skulking behind rocks and in bushes in a circle that ringed him in, crept out of their hiding places and began to make the circle narrower and ever narrower, gnashing their teeth, whilst the stench from their excited bodies grew heavy upon the air, but McGlusky never moved.

All at once, though no sound that human ears could have heard had broken the hush of the night, the soft padding hyena pack halted their ungainly movements, and every muzzle was pointed away from McGlusky. Something had risen from the ground, as though it had been moving upon all fours, something that was blacker than the night, a little human figure, naked as truth itself, excepting for a small rude rawhide quiver that was slung across its shoulder, and hung near its left flank, and a gourd under the right arm. It looked like the figure of a boy well down in his teens. In one hand it carried a bow so small that it had every appearance of a plaything. The arrows in the quiver were so tiny that an ordinary civilized school child would have laughed at them, yet every arrow was winged with certain death for any animal, no matter how huge, or any man who might feel one of those shafts quiver even for a moment in his flesh. If in civilized human eyes the diminutive new arrival and his weapons might have excited derision, it was not so with the hyena pack. No sooner did they sight the figure that rose from the ground, than they vanished like bits of cloud driven across the skies by the rending rush of a storm, for the hyenas knew that remnant of a once powerful race who are known colloquially as the bushmen of Africa, now only a tribe, though once a nation. Dwarfs in stature, they had fashioned for themselves weapons suited to their size, the chief of which was the diminutive bow and the poison-tipped arrows.

Suddenly McGlusky stirred. Perhaps the spirit folk in whom he believed had whispered to him that he must bestir himself, or die. As he lifted himself upright, he turned his broad back to this new peril which menaced him from the heart of the spinifex desert. He was searching with his eyes for some spark of O'Grady's camp fire, which was always lit to keep wild beasts at bay, for the spotted jackal will, when driven by hunger, slash its fangs into a sleeping man's face, and if the sleeper be far spent, he will know no awakening. At McGlusky's motion, the bushman with magical quickness had fitted a tiny arrow to his bow, and held the weapon poised ready to drive the venomed shaft into the back of the man who was not even conscious of his presence. In that second, in which McGlusky's life hung upon something lighter than a butterfly's wing, he began to talk.

"Puir wee Bucky; the dawn canna be far awa' noo, the dawn o' oor last day, A'm thinkin'."

As his words came in something near akin to a babble from McGlusky's lips, the bushman started. Instantly his weapon was lowered to the level of his knees, and his head craned forward. The trail-blazer did not know it, but it was the Scottish burr upon his tongue that had saved him from going for the last ride with the grey reaper whose name is Death. Years before, Gordon Cumming, the greatest hunter

Africa has ever known, had trekked his lonely way into the bushmen's country, and by his manliness had made the little people his friends, and the quick ear of this night prowler had caught the Highland accent in McGlusky's speech, and counted him a tribesman of the great adventurer who had known how to treat the black tribesmen like men. Long after that eventful night the pigmy told McGlusky how he had mistaken him for a Boer, and had intended to send him to his place beyond the shadows, and had given him the reason why he had held his hand, to which Mac had grunted :

" Ech, A ken why nae bushman loves a Boer, an' A ken why they a' love the memory o' the Scotchman, Gordon Cumming. Yin gied them life, the other gied them death, an' plenty o' it."

In that desolate hour, when all his world seemed crumbling to sand around him, a great loneliness fell upon McGlusky's soul, and he yearned for the company of the staunch little pal who was stricken with tribulation even as he himself was. Slowly and painfully he dragged his long limbs campwards, and there he found the little Irishman crouching like some stricken beast of prey, but though he felt that death was not afar off, Bucky O'Grady was game to the last ounce of him, for when Mac seated himself beside his fellow sufferer, and, reaching out, took one of the rough horny hands of his mate in his own, and squeezed it in a pathetic attempt to bestow comfort, O'Grady looked round at him, and did his best to smile.

" Och, matey," he whispered, " shure we're loike the two babes lost in the wood."

Mac did not reply in words, but he patted the hand he held, as if in truth Bucky was one of the babes he had spoken of.

So they sat for a long time, and a few yards away in the lee of a boulder squatted the pigmy bushman, watching them. So still were the pair that a hyena, gaunt, hideous, and bare of fang, emboldened by the motionlessness of the pair it was stalking, drew closer, its padded feet falling as noiselessly as thistledown upon the sand. All at once the loathsome beast paused in its ungainly gait, and began to sniff the air searchingly for the death scent ; as it did so, the black bushman fitted an arrow to his miniature bow, and without even seeming to take aim, he sped a shaft which buried itself three inches into the night prowler's body just behind the shoulder. With a startled cry that was part a wail, part a howl and part a madman's laugh, the big brute leapt forward, turning its head even as it did so, to snap at the shaft of the arrow with its big white fangs. Not more than a dozen bounds did the beast make ere it plunged forward upon its chest, filling the air with the hellish noises that its tribe make, for the point of that arrow had been well and truly steeped in the venom drawn from the poison bags of the black mamba, the deadliest snake that Africa owns ; by the same token, it was the very shaft the bushman had selected some hours earlier to drive between the shoulders of McGlusky when the black nomad had mistaken him for one of his hereditary foes, a Boer. So far spent were the two trail-blazers that they did not even raise their heads when the dying hyena raised its unearthly din, a fact which surprised the bushman, who knew by experience that white hunters in the wild have a habit of sleeping with one eye open and one ear cocked. When he had sped his death-dealing shaft, he had instantly effaced himself by flattening his body along the ground in the shadow of the boulder. He had known by tribal instinct just what the hyena would do, and what kind of a riot it would make when his arrow went home, and he had quite expected the two whites to start to their feet, rifle in hand, and he did not want to be in line with the muzzle of one of those rifles in such a moment as that. Their immobility puzzled him, so he lay waiting and watching long after the dawn came, and then something of the truth of the matter flashed upon him. Turning over on one shoulder, without so much as rustling a blade of the dry grass, he took a long look at the skeleton-like horses, who were all standing with their lips drawn far away from their teeth, a sure and certain sign of water famine.

Having assimilated this knowledge by pondering over it, the black man, laying his bow aside, crept very close to the two figures of the mates ; a shadow could not have moved more softly than did he. McGlusky's big head had fallen forward ; the morning breezes fluttered the tangled masses of his beard ; his left arm was thrown around O'Grady's shrunken shoulders, and the tousled head of the Irishman was drawn lovingly into the Scotch Anzac's lap. One glance at the two agony-twisted faces told the black hunter the whole story better than an hour's talk would have done. Very softly he stooped and took the two rifles from the sand, and, moving stealthily but swiftly, he deposited those deadly weapons behind some bushes well out of sight. Again he returned and removed the big revolvers from the holsters that were strapped around the two waists. He was bent upon a mission of kindness, but he was taking no chances, that little nigger. When he had hidden the latest trophies of his craft and skill, he unslung the gourd that was attached to his quiver ; then, putting his hand under the big man's chin, he lifted the head, and placed the muzzle of the gourd to the terribly swollen and cracked lips, and let a little water trickle on to the clenched teeth. If McGlusky felt these ministrations in some subconscious fashion, he made no sign ; his heavy eyelids did not even lift; he had battled on until the last remnant of his strength had passed away from him. Forcing the jaws open, the black man allowed a little water to trickle over the baked tongue and the almost closed throat, and then he laid McGlusky straight out on his back, and turned his attention to Bucky O'Grady. So far spent was the Irishman that at first the black hunter hesitated before applying the flask to his mouth; his gourd did not contain much more than a pint, and if the little white man was dead, it was no use wasting water upon him, but a faint flutter of the nostrils decided the cast of the die, and as the black had done to the big man, so he did to his mate. The famished horses, scenting the water, small as the quantity spilled had been, drew round, pleading dumbly, but pleading vainly. To each man in turn the bushman repeated his ministrations, until the tremendous vitality inherent in McGlusky brought consciousness back to him, and he lay blinking owlishly into the black face that now grinned down at him good-humouredly. As soon as his brain cleared, Mac rose to one elbow, and snatching the gourd from the bushman's hand, he forced it between O'Grady's distorted lips. So the battle for life went on, until the gourd was drained to its last drop, and when that moment had arrived, the black, picking up the empty vessel, made it plain by a pantomimic display that he would go and refill it, and return. As he slipped away upon his charitable mission, the two hardy trail-blazers looked at each other, and clasped hands with a grim quietness that tells so much to men of their kind.

"Phwat is ut?" thickly gurgled Bucky, with his eyes still on the retreating figure of their saviour. "Phwat is ut?"

"A'm no' sure, but A'm thinkin' it's a miracle, ma son," responded Mac. "Noo let's sleep until it comes back, for A feel as eef A've been awake f'r a thoosan' years."

How long they slept, neither of them ever knew, but when they awakened there was not one bushman but half a dozen, squatting round them, and each held a filled gourd. Gratefully but wisely the pair of trail-blazers drank, and the water spelt immediate life and strength to them.

"Noo f'r oor horses. We'll save them yet, Bucky, my laddie, f'r these bushmen can lead us tae water. A've often heard o' them; they ken whaur there's sma' storages o' fresh water in every desert, but it's no' often they'll show these secret places tae white men, either hunters or prospectors."

Mac had risen as he spoke, and was looking around him in amazement. Not a horse was in sight, not an atom of their camp equipment remained near them; everything had been spirited away while they slept the deep, semi-unconscious slumber that followed such an ordeal as that through which they had passed. Involuntarily Mac's hands dropped to his holsters, where his revolvers should have been, and the expression of incredulous amazement that overspread his features would have been worth a fortune to any caricaturist in civilized centres. The two white men looked at each other, and then Mac ejaculated:

"Weel, A'm dommed. A've been a trail-blazer f'r a lifetime, an' A'm spoofed at last. A didna think the thing lived tha' could hae disarmed me wi'oot me knowin' it."

The bushmen did not understand his words, but they understood his gestures, and that one who had been the first to discover the perishing men beckoned the pair to follow him, and in a few moments they were looking down upon their weapons lying snugly hidden amidst the bushes. As Mac picked up his artillery, he, by words and signs made inquiry after the horses, and soon learned that the animals had been laden with the camp outfit and taken on ahead to a spot where drinking-water lay. As soon as this was clear to the minds of the two white men, O'Grady who was almost himself again, clapped one hand on to the nearest shoulder of that black hunter who was evidently the leader of the party and, lifting his whimsical face up to his mate's, he said :

" McGlusky, by the Sunday shirt of Saint Patrick, yez named this blackie right when yez called ut a miracle, an' Miracle shall be the name av him from now on for ever, Amen, an' if anyone black, white or coffee-coloured, ever tries to do him harm when Bucky O'Grady's near wid a gun in his fist, Oi'll shoot desolation into him—Oi will, bedad, if he's Boer or Briton."

The pair found their horses after a few hours' march at one of the hidden water-holes, found, too, that they had been judiciously attended to, and not allowed to drink themselves into a state of colic. There was good grass in the vicinity in this oasis, and the pair of wayfarers decided to camp until they and their horses had thoroughly recuperated. All the bushmen, excepting Miracle, had flitted away on whatever errand had brought them into the desert, in the dawn of the day that followed the white men's arrival at the water-hole, and during the rest-time Mac, with his wonderful gift for learning languages and dialects, set himself to pick up a sufficiency of the bushman's tongue to form a working basis. Bucky O'Grady tried it also, but soon gave it up in despair.

" Faith," he grumbled, " how the divil can ye make sense av ut at all at all, matey ? Ut sounds loike a cross betune cussin' an' coughin' ter me."

" It's nae sae bad," replied Mac. " Ye ken, ma faither an' mither talked Gaelic, an' I talked it tae when I was a wean, an' the mon who could talk Gaelic could talk tae a tombstone eef he tried. Gaelic's a gran' groon-worrk f'r a' the tongues that were ever talked in Bedlam."

When horses and men had sufficiently recuperated, Miracle led them across the desert, not by any track, trail or landmark, but by some uncanny instinct of his own, and the two trail-blazers knew well, long before they had reached good country, that if it had not been for their miraculous meeting with the little bushman, they would have left their bones in the spinifex desert. Even with his leadership, both the white men heaved hearty sighs of relief when they threw the God-forsaken desolation behind them. Two days' steady travelling after they had left the spinifex country, brought them in sight of mountainous territory, and the spirits of Bucky O'Grady and McGlusky rose as they beheld the jungle-crowned heights.

" By all that's howly, matey," exclaimed O'Grady, pointing to the hills, " phwere the divil do yez think we are ? Meself, Oi'm lost entoirely."

Mac shook his big head, and shrugging his shoulders, replied :

" A'm no' lost, O'Grady, but A'm dommed eef A ken whaur A am. A yince heard Selous—him that was celebrated as a hunter—say that Gordon Cumming had yince told him that he crossed a great desert somewhere in the hinterland o' Africa; an' foond it a lan' flowin' wi' milk an' honey, an' lions an' tree tigers, mountains an' jungles, an' a' kinds o' game, but Selous did not know in which direction the country he spoke of was located, or eef he did, he wadna' tell. P'raps this is it. Eef it is, we're in luck, wee mannie, f'r A'm dootin' eef ony ither white mon, bar Gordon Cumming, ever got intae this mountain country an' got oot again. It's a hunter's paradise, an' maybe there's precious stanes or precious metal hidden awa' i' the bellies o' yon mountains, an' eef we're here on oor lonesome, God kens hoo muckle wealth we may find. A've often thocht," he added ponderously, "that God works in a meesteerious way tae perform his wunners. Maybe, wee mannie, He led us intae that spinifex desert, an' when we were sair spent, He sent the wee nigger tae pilot us tae safety."

"Bedad, Mac, if God led us into that desert, ut's meself that's hopin' He'll show us an aisier way out. Oi'll be dramin' about them hyanas an' vultures an' the blasted sands an' the hot winds for the rest av me mortal loife."

Mac combed his beard with his big fingers, and, looking down upon his diminutive pal, shook his head, remarking sententiously:

"Weel, weel, A'm surprised at ye, wee mannie. It's a gran' thing tae be chosen by the Lord an' tae be led by Him. Ye cant a see His purpose, but maybe He has selected us tae bring the blessing o' knowledge o' civilisation tae the black people dwellin' i' these pairts. Think o' the glory, Bucky, o' bein' able tae enlighten whole nations i' the ways o' the Chreestian releegion, an' think, Bucky, o' the gran' stores o' ivory an' gold an' precious stones tha' we may gather while we're dispensin' grace tae the heathen."

CHAPTER VI

A WILDERNESS DRAMA

RIGHT at the foot of a towering range of mountains which were jungle-covered, dwelt the remnant of Miracle's people, and the whole population poured out to give the two white men and their guide a welcome, for some of those who had been with them in the desert had preceded them to the headquarters of that residue of a nation. To the two white men, who in times past had been familiar with the well-built huts surrounded by stockades of the Zulus and Basutos, the dwelling-places of the pigmy bushmen looked anything but inviting. The huts were badly constructed, and not too clean inside or out. No domestic cattle ranged the open spaces on the foothills, and but few "mealie" fields were in evidence anywhere.

"A'm no' thinkin'," muttered Mac to his companion, "tha' oor new friends are owerburdened wi' the speerit o' industry. It's a gran' country they've got. Look at these foothills rollin' doon towards the plains. Eef it were Zulus who lived here, there wad be cattle in abundance grazin' as far as the eye could reach, an' every wee bit kraal wad hae its patches o' mealie fields, wi' the wummen hoein' an' tendin' the mealies frae morn till nicht. A'm no' sure, but frae wha' A gather frae oor friend, Miracle, an' frae wha' ma eyes teach me here, A'm suspicionin' tha' these little niggers are no tillers o' the soil, neither are they herdsmen: they're just hunters who live by the fruit o' the chase, an' eef tha's sae, they dinna abide long i' yin spot, f'r they'd no find game enough tae live on eef they did, an' tha's yin reason why their huts are sae poor. They just build dwellin's tha' wull last f'r a wee while. A'm thinkin' they want reformin'; they could get a gran' leevin' frae the soil eef they'd only work on it, an' soil culture is the first step towards real civilisation. Maybe this is the job the Lord had i' His mind f'r me when He lugged you an' me intae the spinifex desert, Bucky. A'll commune wi' the Lord the nicht. Maybe this is ma first job, the reformation o' this people. A can feel the speerit o' a gran' purpose stirrin' wi'in me. A feel uplifted; a sort o' new nobility is thrillin' through ma blood like new wine, Bucky; I—— Lord A'michty, wha's tha'?"

The big fellow pointed with one gnarled finger to a flat rock that upreared itself above a broad stream that was rushing downward from the mountains, a stream that raged and foamed and tore itself to milk-white tatters in its headlong progress. On the rock which McGlusky's finger had indicated stood a native damsel, slender as a lily stem, shapely as anything that was ever carved by Grecian sculptor, and as naked as a pipe stem. She had evidently just ceased disporting herself in the milk-white foam of the miniature torrent, and now stood on the flat rock in the sun's rays drying herself. Her arms were lifted gracefully above her head, and the palms of her hands were outspread like one who worshipped the sun. Perhaps it was his new-born religious ecstasy that caused McGlusky's eyes to glisten as he looked upon this primal picture, but Bucky O'Grady did not seem to think so, if one could judge by the impish grin that overspread the Irish features.

"Phwat is ut?" chuckled O'Grady. "Be the sowl av me, what should ut be but a she-pagan washin' herself widout soap? See how the water sparkles on the black hide av her, Mac, an' drips from her currls on to her shoulders. If she was dressed in a taste av a petticoat—a red wan f'r choice—she'd look good enough ter put in a picture-book."

"Eef she was white," murmured McGlusky, with a sort of ecstasy in his voice, "she'd be fit tae stand amang the statuary i' the Pantheon at Rome, where once A spent a holiday. Look at the lines o' her. She's as black as Hagar, whom Abraham loved, an' altogether beautiful. A'm thinkin' it wad be a noble work tae convert her tae Chreestianity."

"Convert her ter the dacency av wearin' a crinoline y're manin'. Come off ut, Mac, an' don't be afth mixin' up yer religion wid wimmin an' ivory a gold, or ye'll be endin' wid a poisoned arrow between yer blade-bones. Remember black human nature is divilish loike white human nature, an' the divil an' a wumman are not far apart when ut comes ter the makin' av mischief. Oi'm knowin' phwat Oi'm talking about, Mac : Oi've been married eleven toimes."

Mac started at this astounding statement.

"Bucky, ye deil, is it the truth ye're tellin' me? You eleven times marrit ? "

"Well," grinned Bucky, "there's been that many wimmen that called themselves Mrs. O'Grady out here in Africa."

"Whaur are they ? " demanded McGlusky.

"Faith, they're buried, an' that's why Oi'm here. The last wan Oi buried at Bloemfontein, an' the week afther Oi planted her, the Government astrologer said we were goin' ter have a season av such foine warm rains as Africa had never known before, an' every blasted thing that was planted would av a certainty sprout up again, so Oi left before the rains, Mac. Oi thought if the eleven av 'em sprouted up at once Oi'd have more than a bed full, so Oi shtruck f'r the back counthry. Now stop feastin' yer eyes on that black image, an' come wid me an' learn if there's any loike yerself. Look at her—she could almost swim in her own grease."

"A'm no' lookin' at the wumman," responded Mac severely. "It's on the tangle i' the tree tops A'm fixin' ma een."

"Oi'm belavin' yez," chuckled O'Grady, "but there's some who know yez who wouldn't, Mac. Faith, if she wasn't black, she'd be a darlint ye could write poetry about. She's as shapely as a young pullet, an' when she looks back at yez an' smiles an' shows the whites av her teeth an' the whites av her eyes, Oi'm wonderin', matey, if ye couldn't manage to forget ye're the descendant av Highland chieftains."

What response the big fellow might have made to this declaration of the Irishman's, only the Lord knows, for at that moment they reached the end of the jungle trail, and stood on the mountain crest. Below them the grass-covered earth rolled gloriously down into a valley, the bottom of which lay so far below that McGlusky, sighting it with a hunter's gaze, exclaimed rapturously:

"Look there, mon, O'Grady. Ye couldna' reach the bottom o' this wi' twa rifle shots, an' it's as open as an English meadow. Just a clump o' trees here an' there. Look at the downward sweep o' it; it rolls from unner oor feet like a green sea, wave on wave, miles o' it. Eef this is no' a hunter's paradise, A've never seen yin. Look at the mountains risin' on the ither side o' the valley. Losh, but they tower richt up tae the cloods, an' the peaks o' them are lost i' the mists. Mon, they're awe-inspirin', yon mountains. There's room an tae spare here f'r an army o' white farmers an' settlers." He was drawing in the beautiful fresh air that the open spaces provided, through his widely swelling nostrils, as he spoke. "A feel," he added solemnly, "as eef A were standin' i' yin o' nature's gran' cathedrals built by the han' o' the Great

Designer. Does it no' stir ye tae y'r marrow, wee mannie ? "

" Bedad an' it don't," grumbled O'Grady. " The thing that's stirrin' in me is the want av a meal. Ye can't ate rocks or miles av open grassland. Phwat's that movin' down there, around to the roight ? Ut looks to me loike breakfast on four legs."

McGlusky swung half round in the direction indicated, and saw some twenty or thirty animals that had just broken from the jungle and were making their way over the open grassland. They moved fearlessly like creatures unaccustomed to be hunted.

" Phwat are they, Mac ? " exclaimed the Irishman excitedly. " Am Oi dramin', or is pork about ? "

" Ye micht be dreamin', but it's pork all richt," responded McGlusky, swiftly adjusting the sights of his rifle even as he spoke. " It's a mob o' *bosch-vaark*, or bush pigs, an' the big boar in the lead wi' the double tusks an' the twa things stickin' oot yin unner each eye, is the *voorlooper*, or leader, an' a deil o' an ugly customer ye'd find him eef ye wounded him, for the *voorlooper* o' the *bosch-vaarks* wull charge richt hame at mounted man or foot man when he turns at bay, an' yin slash o' his big tusks wull cripple the finest horse that ever trod turf."

" Och, Mac, cut out the natural history, an' give us some dinner."

With a grunt that might have meant anything, McGlusky dropped to one knee, but before he could fire, Miracle, the little black bushman, came speeding to his side, bounding over the turf like an india-rubber ball, and at his appearance McGlusky let his rifle drop from his shoulder into his ever ready hands.

" Phwat's the little black divil jabberin' about ? " snarled O'Grady.

Mac, who was following the bushman's words and eager gestures, explained the situation tersely to the irate Irishman.

" A canna follow all the blackie is sayin', but A'm thinkin' he an' the rest o' his hunters want tae get between the mob o' bush pig an' the jungle before A fire, sae haud yer blether an' watch the wee niggers."

At Mac's sign of acquiescence, Miracle and his tribesmen flitted off along the edge of the jungle, as noiselessly as shadows and as fleet of foot as springbok. When they had taken up a position which would cover the retreat of the bush pigs if they attempted to wheel and charge back into the jungle, Mac, considering the time to operate had arrived, remarked tersely :

" Doon on yin knee, O'Grady, an' pick the likeliest-looking young *bosch-vaark* i' the mob tae shoot at. It's nae use shootin' the auld *voorlooper ;* he'll be as tough as a man-eatin' tiger. Noo get tae it. A'm goin' tae shoot. It's oor chance tae stan' weel wi' these bushmen who hae befriended us."

The animals were a good distance away by this time, as they had been moving at a fairly rapid trot towards their favourite feeding ground, but Bucky bowled one of them over, for though nothing like the wizard McGlusky was with a gun, he was more than a useful shot. The echo of Mac's rifle followed so closely on that of his companion that the two sounds blended, and from that moment Mac attended strictly to business, and soon quite a number of the *bosch-vaark* were sprawling on the grass, kicking and squealing in their death anguish. At the first signal of disaster, the old *voorlooper* had wheeled, and was leading his herd back at racing pace towards the jungle and safety, for instinct told him that once in that labyrinth security was assured, but the old general for once in his lengthy lifetime was sadly out in his calculations, for as he neared the jungle, the little bushmen, who had been lying flat upon the soil, rose to their knees, their bows in their hands, the arrows fitted to the strings. Like McGlusky, they were out for meat, not for sport, and they sent their death-dealing arrows into the pick of the young ones of the herd, and let the old leader rush onward unscathed. Their tiny arrows did not check the animals they wounded instantly, as bullets would have done; the stricken creatures rushed on for a few strides, then staggered, swayed and fell. The poison with which the hunting arrows were tipped was not taken from the fangs of the deadly black mamba; for work like this the natives used a poison known as "mangue," which they extract from the striped caterpillar, and which is pretty nearly as deadly as that taken from the black mamba snake, though not so rapid in its operation, yet they had no hesitation in eating the spoil that fell to their archery, and they suffered no ill effects from their feasting. Perhaps they were inoculated to that sort of thing by generations of usage, but neither McGlusky nor O'Grady would willingly partake of anything that had been killed by a poisoned arrow.

The old *voorlooper* had almost reached the shelter of the jungle, when he found his course checked by the presence of a black hunter, and without an instant's hesitation, the old warrior, with the bristles all along his scaly spine standing erect, uttered a grunt of unutterable rage: then, lowering his head, he charged right home. The black bushman was an agile fellow and had too much knowledge of the ways and methods of wild boars to attempt to stop the rush of such a veteran with a pigmy arrow. He made a bound to one side; his foot caught in a trailing creeper, and he sprawled forward upon hands and knees. Instantly the great boar swerved in its flight, for here was vengeance for the slaughter of his family and kinsfolk. His little eyes had turned almost red with the fury that was in him, his big tusks were foam-flaked from the gnashing of his jaws. The tragedy did not last ten seconds. With one downward and sideways sweep of his great head, the *bosch-vaark* chieftain struck his deadly stroke, ripping the naked hunter open from hip to arm-pit, and the animal's snort of triumph mingled with the black hunter's death yell.

Bucky O'Grady was about to put a bullet into the carcass of the *voorlooper* as it plunged into the tangle of trees, when McGlusky, with an impetuous movement, struck the Irishman's barrel upward.

"Phwat in hell are yez doin'?" blurted O'Grady.

"For why wad ye shoot the gran' beastie?" answered Mac calmly. "We dinna want him f'r meat, an' he was ainly wi'in his richts in killin' a' he could o' those who were killin' his family an' kinsfolk. He wad hae been a puir spunkless wastrel o' a leader eef he hadna struck a blow o' vengeance when he had the chance. An eye f'r an eye is guid law, whether it pertains tae mon or beast."

The bushmen made light of the death of their comrade. He had died as he had lived, and there were not many of that tribe who came to a peaceful ending, and fewer still who desired to do so. They were Ishmaelites; they lived by what they could kill, and expected to be killed themselves. Some of the women wrapped the dead body up in green bark that was swiftly stripped from the trunks of trees, which they bound round with creepers, then a dozen of them, carrying the dead man in their midst, marched homewards, chanting the death lament of their people, and keeping time to their voices with the beating of their naked feet upon the soil, and McGlusky noted that they carried the dead man feet forward on his last pilgrimage.

As soon as the death party had disappeared over the brow of the mountain, the rest of the bush folk, male and female, commenced to cut up all the *boschvaark* that had fallen either to arrow or bullet. This work they performed with wonderful expedition and neatness. Each little heap of meat was bound together by long lengths of the creeper vine that grew in abundance ready to their hands. A certain portion was put on one side for the hunters who had remained; the rest the women carried off to the black cantonment on the plains below. As soon as the women disappeared, the men began to cook for themselves a feast on which they gorged, and then stretched themselves out to rest luxuriously upon the grass. Mac and O'Grady had secured one of the carcasses which Mac had shot, and, carrying this to the side of a little mountain rivulet, they dressed their meat according to civilised usages, and whilst a portion was grilling, they stripped and refreshed themselves in the cold mountain stream, and by the time their food was ready, they were ravenously hungry and ready for it.

As the pair were lying on their backs, with their stomachs comfortably filled and their pipe-stems between their teeth, O'Grady opened the floodgates of his soul.

"Mac," said he, "wan toime the O'Grady's were kings in Oireland."

"Iphm," crooned Mac. "Every Irishman A've met in a' ma travels has been the descendant o' a king. A'm thinkin' every cabin must hae held a king i' the country ye cam' frae, O'Grady."

"The divil dhry the bones av me, Mac, if Oi care if ut was phwat ye say ut was, McGlusky, but Oi'm knowin' this: no king in all Oireland or Scotland ayther fer that matter, ever had a grander loife than we're havin'. Here's pork runnin' about askin' ter be shot, an' we haven't got ter say 'By yer lave' to squire or landlord, or any other kind av a two-footed divil. All we've got to do is to shoot ut an' bake ut en' ate ut, an' then lie on our backs on the warm earth, wid the sweet grass ticklin' our ears, an' the grandest lookin' scenery in the wide, wide world stretchin' out in front an' below us, an' divil a tax ter pay or any throuble at all at all. Faith, Mac, there's about a million people in dear dirthy Dublin who never know where to-morrow's breakfast's to come from. If them that govern in thim ould counthries had the brains av a buck rabbit, they'd thin out thim crowded cities an' give the people who live ten at a toime in wan room a chanct to come here an' live. Live—they don't live at all at all in Ireland, not the poor wans, but they could live here." The little man rose to a sitting posture, and threw his arms wide, as if he would embrace mountain, dale and glen. "Bedad, McGlusky, ut's yerself an' meself that's greather than any two kings."

"Sometimes," purred Mac, "when A'm conseederin' ye, Bucky O'Grady, A arrive at the opeenion that the inside o' y'r head is made o' mutton—no' tha' A wish tae lessen the guid opeenion ye hae o' yersel', wee mannie. But," he continued after a couple of pulls at his pipe, "there are ither times when y'r conversation comes wi'in the borders o' common sense, an' this moment is yin o' them. Ireland wad be a' the better eef the manhood an' wummanhood born an' bred there wad ask God A'michhty tae gie them the spunk tae step awa' frae the squalor o' the lives they lead, an' come an' people sic a place as this, but they'll never dae it until they get a great mon worth callin' a leader. They'll just gang on an' breed like rabbits, livin' an' dyin' in hutches."

This attack upon his people stirred O'Grady's never too placid temper.

"Och, Mac," he snarled, "ye are loike the divil rakin' coals in hell, an' complainin' av the heat. Phwat yez say about Oireland is thrue enough, but ut's just as thrue about Scotland. Thousan's av phwat they call homes in Dublin an' in Irish villages an' towns, are just pest-houses that stink to hiven an' cry out wid dumb eloquence to the Creathor against the sin av such places bein' used to house men an' wimmen, to ate an' dhrink, live an' die, an' slape an' spawn children in. But they're no worse, McGlusky, than the slum homes—divil run away wid the word—Oi've seen in Glasgow an' all round the minin' villages av Scotland, an' well yez know ut, Mac, f'r ye have been there. Scottish homes!" The little Irishman's lips curled scornfully. "There's tens av thousands av thim Scottish hovels a dacent billy-goat would not hould a bridal party in."

"A'm no' sayin' ye're no richt," growled the big man in response to this fiery outburst, "but A'm thinkin' it's the wummen who are tae blame f'r it. A've been in maist o' the auld countries, and this thing ye find starin' ye i' the face wherever ye travel: the auld lands are ower-populated, Bucky: science has done awa' wi' plagues an' pestilence, wars are bein' stamped oot, but the wummen gang on breedin'. The auld earth is gettin' ower-stocked wi' humans."

O'Grady pursed up his lips and whistled slowly, then exclaimed:

"By the sacred white elephant, Mac, me mate, ye are a gaynius; ye've solved the throuble that is breeding anarchy all over Europe. Them words av yours should be written in gold an' hung up in ivery tenement house an' ivery cabin an' ivery hovel. Oi'm takin' off me hat to yez, McGlusky."

"A'weel," murmured Mac modestly, "A'm takin' nae credit f'r it. Great thochts come tae great minds as naturally as breathin' comes tae a babe."

Half an hour later, McGlusky rose, knocked the dottle out of his pipe, and, after stretching his gigantic limbs, he ordered O'Grady to go and stir up the bushmen. Ten minutes later the Irishman came back with the information that he could not get a move out of any of the dusky hunters.

" By me troth," he exclaimed disgustedly, " they've stuffed themselves right up to the muzzles wid swine's flesh, an' now they're slapin' ut off. Let's go down on our own, Mac, an' see phwat there is in the valley beyant. The niggers can easily foind us when they wake up. Oi think they could follow the trail av a butterfly flittin' from flower to flower ; they've got eyes loike hawks, an' a bent bit av grass tells a whole story to them."

" Come on, then," grumbled Mac, casting a disgusted glance in the direction of his black allies, who lay sprawling in any bit of shade that boulders or bushes afforded.

It had looked a pretty long trek down the swiftly sloping mountain side, but it was longer than it looked, and at every few yards the two white trail-blazers were halted by some new revelation of natural beauty. At one place in their descent, as they stood upon a little mound, they were confronted by acre upon acre of wild verbenas in full flower, and Mac, who was a colour lover, stood bathing his eyes in the rich flood of natural beauty that made a carpet at that particular spot for the world. After the pair had feasted their eyes upon this dream of natural beauty, they walked onward and downward, McGlusky lifting his big feet high, and letting them come down as gingerly as possible upon the beautiful blooms, and at every step they took their feet crushed the wild flowers until the air was full of the scent the wild verbena sends forth when its juices are squeezed from it by weight pressure. When they had about reached the middle of this wilderness of flowers, McGlusky, turning his eyes upon his little comrade, remarked :

" A'm feelin' like a young bride walkin' on a flowery highway."

" Are yez ? " chortled O'Grady. " Thin, Mac, if ye are the bride, Oi'm damn glad Oi'm not the bridegroom. Yez look more loike a pirate bustin' into paradise than a bride."

" Havers," grumbled Mac. " Ye've nae mair poetry i' y'r whole ootfit, Bucky O'Grady, than a he-goat. It was a metaphor A was usin'."

" Was ut ? An' phwat's a metaphor, Mac ? "

" Iphm—a metaphor, ye ignorant Irishman, is the mither o' a parable."

" Och, McGlusky, come down to earth. Phwat do yez want wid metaphors an' parables an' poetry, an' all this that's beautiful around us ? "

A little further on the pair blundered into a basin filled with mimosa trees, and every tree was laden with its wealth of golden bloom, and the air was heavy with its almost Asiatic perfume. After gazing a while on this mass of golden glory, the two men plunged on amidst the trees. Like most men who had lived a goodly portion of their lives in the wilds, they moved with instinctive quietness ; their feet fell noiselessly upon the velvet sward, and when a flower-laden branch lay across their trail, they lifted it quietly and let it fall silently back into its place behind them. They were not running any danger, nor hoping to surprise any game ; their cautious movements were instinctive, the outcome of years of work in the wilds. Suddenly they came upon the edge of a little clearing right in the middle of the mimosa forest.

" Sh-s-h-s——"

This warning sound, like the hiss of a snake, broke from McGlusky's lips, and halted O'Grady in his tracks. Swiftly the Irishman looked upward into Mac's face, to read the cause of this warning sound, and a moment later his eyes were following a finger which Mac was pointing in the direction of a bunch of flowering iris that bloomed some twenty paces outward in the clearing. O'Grady's eyes were sharp, but not with the lynx-like keenness of the great hunter he was following. He saw what at first appeared to him to be a mass of burnished copper amidst the mass of iris bloom.

" Phwat is ut ? " he whispered in accents so low that a king-fisher bird perched on a bough above them was not disturbed by the sound of it.

Mac made no verbal reply, but flashed a look which commanded silence. Right in front of what appeared like quivering copper to O'Grady, a small covey of quail was feeding. The pretty plump things were moving with incessant restlessness, as is the way of their kind when searching for food, yet, busy as they were, they seemed on the alert, as most wild things are, for all know the dread law of the wilds, which means the survival of those that can take care of themselves. Scratching and pecking industriously, the covey was moving nearer and nearer to the clump of flowering iris, which raised their purple-blue streamers on high. All at once O'Grady made out what the copper-coloured thing was crouching amid the flowers, for he saw a long tail behind the mass wag slightly and quiver, then at the other end he saw a round bullet-shaped head lift slightly from the earth, a head that looked the incarnation of wickedness. He could just make out golden-coloured patches on the sides of the creature's head and over its cheeks ; the rest of the body was red and reddish-white towards the belly. Like something moved by hidden springs, the creature was slightly lifting itself on all four paws, its greenish-golden eyes glaring at the covey of quail, its short ears pricked and twitching. O'Grady touched McGlusky's rifle barrel significantly with his finger, but Mac made a motion of dissent, and in that moment, without the faintest warning and without any apparent effort, the murderous-looking beast launched itself right in amongst the quail, striking with almost lightning speed with both fore-claws. There was a swift whirr of wings, creating the clattering sound which no birds but the quail can make, and the frightened covey rose, but the marauder rose also upon its hind claws, striking in amidst the frightened feathered things with a speed that was lightning-like, and a certainty of eye and claw that was almost incredible. The birds were very swift in their rise, but the destroyer was swifter, and before an eyelid scarce had time to blink, half a dozen of the pretty plump things that a moment before had been all industrious life and gaiety, were lying in ruffled lifelessness upon the greensward.

" The damn baste."

The words broke involuntarily from the lips of Bucky O'Grady. The destroying agent, whose ears are swifter perhaps than those of any other animal Africa owns, caught the harshly grated expletive almost before the words had reached McGlusky's ears. With one quail between its jaws, the animal flashed a glance that was serpentine in its speed and vindictiveness in the direction the human voice had come from, and then leaped right out into the open space and bounded for cover on the opposite side of the mimosas. So rapid were these movements that McGlusky had not time to lift his rifle to his shoulder, but it was in emergencies of this kind that the individuality of the old warlock came out most strongly. He pointed the muzzle and fired from the hip. There was a scurry of reddish-bronze and white fur on the far side of the clearing, as the fleeing beast, struck in mid-bound, dropped, turned over two or three times, writhing like a contortionist, then, regaining its feet, sprang away amidst the trees.

"Good for yez, Mac. Ye've got him, ye've hit him," yelled O'Grady excitedly.

"Ye're tellin' the truth an' leein' a' in yin breath, wee mannie. A've hit him, but A've no' got him, but A soon wull get him. It's no' a Chreestian act tae let a wounded beastie crawl awa' tae die in slow agony. Besides, the pelt o' the deil is worth its weight in siller; it's the finest ever A've seen."

Mac was shooting back the bolt of his rifle, and jamming in a fresh cartridge whilst he was delivering himself of his native mixture of Christian precepts and business principles. As they advanced over the open sward, Mac delivered himself of a caution.

"Watch oot when we get among the trees, f'r eef the beastie's as sair hurtit as A think he is, it will tak' tae the first big tree it comes tae, an' eef ye get wi'in springin' distance it will leap on tae ye an' gash wi' fang an' claw. It's wha' they ca' a bay cat, twa feet frae the groon' tae its shoulder tips. It's no' a fechter, unless it's wounded, but it'll fecht like blazes eef it's hurtit."

The pair pushed on, and had travelled some fifty yards following the blood splashes in the semi-twilight of a mimosa forest, when Mac suddenly half wheeled, and shot out his right fist, catching Bucky O'Grady fairly on the neck, and sending the son of the Emerald Isle yards away, as if he had been shot out of a catapult, and almost before the arm that had struck the blow had been jerked back, a form hurtled through the air, landing almost upon the spot where O'Grady had been standing a second before. It was McGlusky's marvellous power of rapid thought, and the gift of adjusting himself to untoward circumstances with instantaneous speed that had pulled him through so many dangers in his eventful life. As his hand came back from the blow he had delivered to his comrade, it had closed instinctively on the butt of his big Colt revolver that always swung at his hip, and before the beast of prey could recover its lost balance on the ground where it had sprawled on account of its wounded condition, a bullet from the Colt had crashed through its skull. One glance the big fellow gave at the dead quarry, and then turned his attention to his mate who was sitting under a mimosa tree, with a dazed look in his eyes, and a comic expression of bewilderment on his face. As Mac drew near to him, the little man gasped :

" Phwat was ut struck me ? Did ut come from heaven or from thim places below ? Faith, wherever ut came from, Oi'm thinkin' ut broke the neck av me."

" Nae, nae, wee mannie, naethin' struck ye ; A just gied ye a wee bit push on the neck wi' ma fist, tae put ye oot o' danger, f'r the big cat was pouncin' richt doon on top o' ye. Eef A'd no shoved ye aside, the blastie wad hae hurtit ye sair, but praise be, A saw it spring frae the tree, or its claws wad hae gashed yer jug'lar."

For a few moments Bucky O'Grady sat massaging his neck with both hands, then the impish spirit that was in him came to the surface.

" Och, Mac," he drawled, " the next toime a tiger's jumpin' at me, yez hit the tiger, or lave me to the baste. Ye've the kindest heart in the wide worrld, Mac, but the divil himself don't know yer strength. If phwat ye gave me was a push, the saints preserve the man ye hit. There's a swellin' on me neck this minute as big as a boot."

" Dinna fash, dinna fash, matey ; gie ower grumblin' ower a wee matter, an' come an' look at this skin. All the tiger species are beautiful, frae the jaguar o' South America tae the Bengal tiger, the king o' them a', but in its ain way this yin is a dandy."

Thus admonished, O'Grady rose and went to look at the fallen foe.

"Oi've heard av these bay cats," he remarked after a close scrutiny, "but this is the first av the bastes Oi've iver seen. Wance before Oi fell in wid yerself, Mac, Oi was prospectin' in Lobengula's territory, an' the niggers told me the bay cats used to prowl round the edges av the mealie fields an' carry off the babies that the black wimmin left lyin' around loose in the shade av bushes or rocks. Oi didn't belave ut at the toime, fer niggers are as good at tellin' tales to thravellers as white folks are, but Oi belave ut now, lookin' at this dead divil. See the fangs av him, an the claws that have come out av their sheaths in uts death agony."

"Aye," responded Mac. "The blastie's mair than half as big as a Newfoundland dog, an' ye may tak it frae me that wha' the nigger wummen tellt ye was true enough. A shot yin once as it was trottin' awa' wi' a twa-year auld nigger child i' its mooth. It was carryin' the wean as easily as a fox wull carry a goose. Of a' the cat tribe, A think the bay cat is the maist murderous, but it wull never attack a fu' grown man, unless it is maddened wi' wounds."

Whilst he had been talking, Mac had been sharpening his big hunting knife, and soon he and the Irishman between them had the beautiful pelt rolled up ready for portage as a trophy.

"Phwat are yez goin' to do wid the pelt, Mac?" queried the Irishman with a sly twinkle in his eyes. "Are yez goin' to make ut into a short skirt for the daughter av the chief? Ut's the Black Lily Oi'm mainin', the wench that seems to stick as close to yerself as yer shadder since we struck the bushmen's camp. By me troth, ut's not dacent for a wench, even if she is black, to be trottin' round wid a white man, an' herself wearin' nothin' but a smile an' a wink.'

"Pish," exclaimed Mac gruffly. "A believe i' the decencies as much as maist men, but it wad be throwin' frowns i' the face o' Providence tae waste such a pelt as this. Dae ye no' ken it's worth its weight i' gold pieces? A'll mak' the lassie a kilt oot o' a square o' auld canvas we hae in oor pack; she'll be none the wiser an' none the worse."

"Faith, she may be none the wiser, Mac, but think av the grand cause av civilisation ye said ye had so much at heart. Shure, now, ye'd not be afther puttin' the value av the skin av a wild baste in the balance wid them noble sentiments ye was preachin'? Ye'd not be doin' a thing like that, would yez now, Mac?"

There was a rich undernote of hidden laughter in the Irishman's melodious voice as he put his queries with all pretended seriousness, for the pulling of McGlusky's leg was one of the joys of life to O'Grady. All he could get out of his big companion, however, was a grunt, and he knew by the way his comrade cuddled that beautiful and valuable pelt, that the Black Lily's chance of wearing it as a tribute to civilisation was scarce worth considering.

The pair were now pushing on through the belt of mimosa timber, and just as they reached the fringe of it on the far side they were joined by the black hunter, Miracle, who explained to McGlusky that, having heard the report of the white man's weapons, he had followed swiftly in their tracks, and proposed now to keep them company, and the trio at once pushed forward over the open spaces that now lay in front of them. That they were in a land that absolutely teemed with game was made more and more manifest every mile they traversed. Little mobs of beautifully striped quagga, twin brothers to the zebra, grazed fearlessly within easy gun-shot of them as they passed, and betrayed no fear, this fact proving to the two trail-blazers that few, if any, hunting parties of white men with firearms had ever passed that way. Later, as they got within shadow of the mountains towards which they had been steering, they sighted herds of both giraffe and African buffalo, and the significance of the presence of these lordly creatures of the wilds was not lost upon McGlusky, for he said shortly to his comrade:

"Keep yer eyes skinned, Bucky, before ye push that unpleasing countenance o' yours intae any o' the clumps o' tall grass tha' we may be approachin', f'r wherever ye see quagga an' buffalo an' giraffe as plentifu' as we see them the day, ye can bet the last button on y'r breeks there wull be leeons no' far awa' for o' a' meat the leeon loves quagga meat, though eef ye ran intae an auld yin that is gettin' past its huntin' it micht no be above samplin' an Irishman f'r a lunch, so slip a hollow shell intae y'r rifle, an' walk wi' y'r eyes in y'r ears an' y'r ears in y'r eyes."

The wisdom of this advice was soon proven, for as they were skirting a small basin of water that was freely fringed with rushes, Miracle, who had the amazing telescopic eyes of his people, pointing to some tracks in the damp clay, exclaimed nonchalantly:

"Tao, big plenty Tao," and "Tao," as both the white hunters knew was a common name for lions amongst natives from Bechuanaland into the far interior.

McGlusky swung out of his line of march, and went to inspect the tracks that Miracle had indicated, and the long, low whistle to which he gave vent denoted his surprise.

"Phwat is ut, matey?" demanded O'Grady, running up to him.

"Wha' is it? Mak' use o' y'r eyes, an' ye'll no need any tellin' it's a whole family o' leeons, faither an' mither an' twa half-grown cubs; the whole hatchin' o' them hae been here tae drink, an' by the look o' the spoor it's no long since they cam' an' went. Walk wide o' the tall grass noo, ma mate, an' gie every boulder ye see in front o' ye a wide berth. There's naething in a' created things sae lazy as a well-fed leeon, an' there's food enough on four hoofs hereabouts tae keep a whole colony o' leeons in idleness."

"Phwy the divil did Miracle take ut so aisy when he saw them lion thracks, an' him wid no weapon but a bow that wouldn't kill a birrd if ut wasn't fer the poison on the arrows he uses? Hasn't he sense enough to know danger when he sees ut?"

"Dinna blether aboot Miracle's want o' sense; leeons are nae new things tae him; he's been brought up wi' them in front o' his eyes a' the days o' his life, an' he kens their habits just as weel as the quagga dae. Ye watch him as he walks, an' ye'll see he scans every bit o' cover tha' wad hide a leeon or a leopard, wi' those eyes o' his that miss naething. He's no' afraid, but he's no' a fool, an' A'm thinkin' tha' the leeon who wad get near tae Miracle i' the open wad hae tae drop frae the clouds, an' A'll wager he had arrows in his quiver fresh tipped wi' the poison o' the black mamba, an' eef yin o' those arrows stick an inch deep i' the carcass o' a leeon, the brute wullna travel many yards before it drops."

Whether Miracle understood what was passing between the two white men, or because he felt it was his duty as a hunter traversing his own particular stretch of country, the little bushman glided away a good dozen strides in front of his white companions, and as he moved he carried his bow in such a manner that he could use it almost instantaneously, and in this way they proceeded uneventfully over a few leagues of country. Suddenly, as the black guide was skirting a goodly sized hillock, he wheeled and, facing the white men, threw up his hands in a gesture that betokened both haste and caution. The signs were not lost upon either Mac or O'Grady. Crouching low, they advanced with noiseless speed to the spot where Miracle stood. No words passed when the three men stood together; the black simply pointed to a little group of quagga feeding peacefully some two hundred yards away on the hunter's left front. For a brief moment the black finger pointed motionlessly, then swept round in a half circle to a point some fifty yards in the rear of the beautifully marked animals that are neither horse nor ass, but have something of both in their make and shape, full cousins as they are to the zebra. At the spot indicated, the watching men saw a huge yellowish-grey figure stretched almost at full length upon the ground. There was no need for the one word which Miracle now whispered: "Tao." The two syllables came from the mobile lips as softly as a sigh, and McGlusky nodded understandingly. The monstrous beast had been motionless when the white men first beheld it; now it advanced one forepaw in a long, stealthy, thrusting motion, that seemed to feel its way through the grass rather than to thrust the herbage aside. Then came another pause, and the other forepaw went forward in exactly the same deadly, stealthy, menacing fashion. A second later the great carnivore drew its hind quarters forward with the same infinite care and soundlessness. Its long tail was thrust straight out behind it, almost arrow-straight, and the watching men could see the tufted hair at the tail's extremity quiver softly in the passing breeze. The immensely powerful shoulders were hunched high; the massive lower jaws were close to the soil, and the fiercely blazing eyes were fixed in a dreadful glare full upon a quagga stallion that cropped the grass in the rear of the small mob of its kind. The wind was blowing right from the quagga on to the murderous marauder, hence their calmness; had the wind veered for a moment and carried a taint of lion scent to the nostrils of the striped beauties, they would have been off in an instant at the top of their speed, and on fair ground they were as fast as an ordinary hunting hack. The lion knew this as well as the quagga, and that was why the great brute was creeping inch by inch upon his quarry against the wind. Had the breeze been blowing from the opposite direction, the fine stallion would have been at the other end of the mob, for the wild stallions always act as sentinels for the mares and foals. The lion had to be crafty as a cat, for a quagga stallion on sentry does not depend upon its keen sense of scent alone; it makes good use of its eyes and ears as well as its nostrils.

The fine looking brute the great carnivore was so stealthily stalking seemed at last to sense some impending peril. With head lifted high, short, sharp ears well pricked, nostrils a-quiver, it looked keenly in all directions, questing the air for hostile scent. Noticing some of the foals drifting apart from their dams, the stallion made the air ring with a sudden sharp whistle that blew from its nostrils, then it stamped the hard earth smartly with its fore-hoofs, a command which the mares at once obeyed by calling their progeny to them with imperative neighs. All the time the stallion stood there on duty, the lion remained as if carven out of stone.

"The deil's buckie," growled Mac under his breath. "Ye'd no' think he was a livin' thing the noo; he looks like a lump o' petrified sin. See the big blastie hae even closed his eyes, f'r fear the stallion should sight the blaze o' them."

"Och, the sight av the big skunk makes me sick at me stummick. Oi'll pump a bit av lead into his ribs just behint the shouldther, matey."

"Na, na, O'Grady; it's yin o' the great unwritten dramas o' the wilds—let's see it oot. Nature must hae some purpose i' sic things, or they'd no' happen; there's a guidin' han' in every act o' nature's, ma son."

"Is there, bedad? You go an' tell that to the quagga, Mac, an' see phwat they'll have to say about ut. You'd not be so mighty trustin' in the 'guidin' hand' if ut was yerself the four-futted divil was manin' to make a breakfast out av."

"Watch the leeon, an' haud yer gab."

This terse, if inelegant, order was not uncalled for. The monarch of wood and wold was in motion again, now that the quagga stallion was once more nibbling at the grass. The muscles beneath the tawny skin could plainly be seen running in ripples, as the stealthy march of intended murder was recommended; every scrap of cover was taken advantage of, every possible inch of open ground was avoided. All at once the lion began to draw its massive body together, just as a concertina that has been outdrawn to its limit is compressed by the hands of an artist. At that moment a swift, low, hissing sound broke from Miracle's dusky lips, and he made a motion conveying the idea that the crisis of the wilderness drama was at hand, and it was. The lion launched its indiarubber-like body forward, shaking the sentient air with a violent roar as it did so. The distance between the destroyer and the quarry was too great to be covered by the hunter with one majestic bound, but the space it did encompass was terrific. Scarce had its padded feet struck the soil, ere its pent-up vitality sent it hurtling through the air again. The brute's objective was the sentinel stallion, and the attacker had calculated its distance well.

The first rush and terrifying roar had seemingly petrified the quagga stallion, for the space of time an eyelid takes to wink, but the brave beast soon shook off the incubus of panic. Wheeling in its own length with almost incredible speed, it showed its hind quarters to its hereditary foe, and as the lion made its second and intended fatal leap, the striped beauty lashed out both heels with all the power and speed that nature had crowded into its elastic body. The outgoing hoofs, hard as iron and sharp as chiselled steel at the edges, met the oncoming mass of bone and muscle in mid-air, and the impact was appalling in its force; the very volume of speed the lion had put into its spring added enormously to the shock. The monarch of the world's waste places was hurled backwards, as though slung from a catapult, with blood gushing from its gaping muzzle where one outflung hoof had landed squarely, and a similar stain showing redly on the tawny chest where the other hoof had struck.

"Hurroo! Bully for the donkey wid th' sthriped trousies! Now thin, run, ye little fool, run," yelled Bucky O'Grady, who had all a true Irishman's love for a game fighter battling against long odds, but the quagga stallion had not time to run, for the lion was no sooner down than it leapt again.

Instinct told the quagga that this would happen, for what each generation of wild things learns, they hand down in memory cells to those that come after them, and what is born in the brain is never forgotten; it is the ripe fruit of the greatest university beneath the skies. The quagga had not time to bolt; it had barely time to wheel nimbly on one side, and as the tawny destroyer shot through the air with fore-claws extended and bloody jaws agape and fangs agleam the quagga's hoofs thudded on its ribs like drumsticks on a drum. The clever defender was fighting with its head half slewed round, to watch every movement of the leviathan of the cat kind. As it watched, it manœuvred so as to have its hind quarters in a line with the attacking force. Seldom will a lion return to its attack when it has been foiled in its first impetuous charge, but when famished or wounded, it will attack and keep on attacking. The beast the hunters were watching was mad with the pain of the gashes the quagga's hoofs had inflicted. Four times it sprang, and was beaten, but the quagga's strength was failing fast, and the fifth time the big cruel hooked claws buried themselves in the hind quarters of the stallion, and one downward wrench brought the sentinel of the herd tumbling to the grass. One wild scream of agony and rage broke from the fallen champion's lips, a cry more like the throaty note of the wild ass than the piercing pain cry of a horse. One terrific downward stroke of the lion's paw brought everlasting silence. Then the conqueror in the uneven battle stood with both forepaws on the still quivering body of the slain, and boomed forth the hollow roar that heralds a kill, and in that moment the quagga herd that had rushed a little way from the scene of the strife and had stood as mobs, animal or human, will when bereft of a leader, huddled up in panic. The thunderous roar of triumph put wings into their feet, and they galloped madly, unseeingly, up wind, and then the craft of the lions was made manifest.

The one that had attacked the stallion had been the most experienced of a band of lions camping in the vicinity, and its job had been to work its way round behind the quaggas and attack, and so stampede the whole mob, and send them galloping crazily right into the very claws of the band of lions waiting and watching in the shelter of high grass up wind. Miracle, the little bushman hunter, knew well what was about to happen, for as the herd of quagga fled, he grinned broadly, and, pointing to the tall grass towards which the striped beauties were racing, he said to McGlusky:

"Tao. Plenty many tao. Soon see."

To Miracle, this was sport; a company of lions trapping their prey was as entertaining to him as a coursing match to an English country squire, but of the two the black savage had by far the more imposing sight.

Scarce had the foremost ranks of the quagga reached the fringe of the tall grass, ere a dozen great tawny forms rose from the herbage, and leapt amongst them with terrifying effect. Some of the huge cats struck with iron-hooked claws, as they came down on their quarry, cracking a skull, or breaking a backbone; others, leaping at the forepart of the nearest victim, dug their talons into the shoulders, and buried their fangs in neck or wither; it mattered little where they struck —in every instance the quarry went down to a swift and bloody ending.

"Mother av God," whispered Bucky O'Grady thickly, as he stood watching the revel, as the colony of lions ripped and tore the warm flesh from the bones. "Phwat kind av a sandwich wud yerself an' me have made, Mac, for a light luncheon fer that lot? Phwat do yez say, pardner, to us distributin' a little lead amongst thim murtherin' bastes?"

"A'm no seein' the need f'r it, O'Grady. The leeons ainly acted after the manner o' their kind; they killed to eat, for they must eat tae live, an' they canna eat grass, they hae no the teeth f'r it."

"Troth, an' that's thrue f'r yez, Mac, but where does all y'r talk about the kindly guidin' hand behind everything in nature come in, old sport? The quagga were atin' grass, an' sorra a bit av harm were they doin' at all at all, an' now the blasted big cats are atin' the quagga. The body av your philosophy has got paper legs, Mac, an' won't stand against the winds av real things that happen."

McGlusky stood some time fumbling with his whiskers, but made no reply, so O'Grady resumed tauntingly:

"Own up, ye are in the wrong, ye blanket-headed Scotchman."

"A'll no own A'm wrong. A canna explain yon happenin' on the spur o' the moment, but f'r a' tha', A ken A'm richt. There *is* a guidin' purpose behin' everything tha' happens; we sometimes see the thing, but we canna see or guess the purpose."

"Stop bouncin' about in the clouds, Mac, an' come down to earth. Tell me now, if God made harmless, grass-eatin' quagga, phwy did He make lions to ate 'em? Answer me that now?"

"A'm dommed eef A ken," growled McGlusky, "why th' Almichty made leeons ta kill innocent animals, an' wha's mair, A'm dommed eef A ken why He made Irishmen ta fire fule questions inta a thinkin' mon. It's as easy tae ask unanswerable questions, O'Grady, as it is f'r a mon tae find a prickly Scotch thustle eef ye sit on it wi' y'r kilt up unner y'r armpits.'

CHAPTER VII

MCGLUSKY'S GREAT DISCOVERY

MAC and O'Grady took good care not to camp anywhere near the scene of the slaughter of the quagga. Long before night fell they had pushed on, guided by Miracle, until they reached the foot-hills that led to the tall mountains that guarded the far side of the noble valley. As soon as they decided upon a camping place, they all set to work to gather a plentiful supply of fuel to last through the night, McGlusky remarking:

"Yin camp fire will na dae f'r a place like this; we must hae twa, an' both o' them big yins. We've seen leeons in plenty oot on the plains, an' eef A'm no' mistaken there's mair leopards an' panthers in yon hills than we'll be needin'. A saw the spoor o' mair than yin at the last watter pan, an' A'm no seeking a midnight vessit fra any o' them, an' Miracle hae tellt ma there air ither things in the mountains tha' air as bad or worse than panthers, but we need na fear them o' nichts, it's in the daytime we'll hae trouble wi' them."

"Phwat kind o' things cud be worse than panthers, an' them wid empty bellies?" demanded O'Grady.

"Weel, frae wha' A can gather frae the bushman, the mountains air full o' things tha' air no baboons an' no quite gorillas, a lot too big f'r the first, an' no quite big enough f'r the ithers. Miracle says they air maist as black as he is, wi' long shaggy hair on 'em frae top ta tae; they stan' as high frae the groond when they walk on twa feet as he does, an' their arms air so long they can pick a thing frae the groond when they're walkin' wi'oot mair than just stoopin' their shoulders."

"Oi'm thinkin' Miracle's a liar, Mac."

"He'd be a miracle eef he was na. A've never met a big game hunter in any country who was no' an embroiderer o' the truth, no yin, excep'n ma ainsel' an' a few mair perhaps who were Scotch by birth or extraction. A Scot is too canny tae tell lees, he kens liars air maist sure tae be foon' oot."

O'Grady put his head under his armpit and grinned delightedly, for he had an idea that he had known his big comrade to paint the lily when describing some of the big game he had bagged.

"Oi'll chanct the baboons or gorillas or phwat ever they are," he chortled, "ut's lions an' panthers that Oi'm yearnin' to steer wide av, Mac."

"Miracle says there air na leeons in the mountains, because the big apes drive them oot."

"Phwy don't they drive out the panthers too, thin?" chuckled Bucky.

"Go an' ask the apes, ye blastie. Y're as fu' o' questions as an old maid at a birth bedding: ye want tae ken a' wi'oot winnin' experience an' payin' the price o' knowledge," groaned McGlusky.

That night passed without any event of note happening, but all three men were kept vividly aware that the darkness just beyond the illuminations of their big camp fires was teeming with animal life, and most of the nocturnal prowlers are dangerous to man. Creatures that will slink rapidly out of his path in daylight, will attack him readily enough under cover of night's mantle; they seem to know by instinct that the eyes of humans are only of use in the light of day. Some such thoughts as these must have been passing through O'Grady's mind before he kicked off his blankets in the dawn, for at breakfast he said :

" Mac darlint, phwin th' guidin' hand tha' accordin' to your philosophy, set this auld world movin' an' has been keepin' ut in order iver since, was makin' eyes f'r men an' animals, phwy did ut make humans most as blind as week-old kittens in the dark, an' give cats av all kinds, big an' little, lamps behint their eyes, so's they can see as well by night as by day ? I saw fifty pair av eyes gleamin' through the blackness last night before Oi went to sleep, an' ivery blessed pair av eyes seemed to be tellin' me phwat a nice pickin' Oi'd make f'r supper. Oi niver felt so popular wid meself before in all me born days."

" Eef the controlling powers o' nature had intended man tae be a night prowler, man wad hae been gied the eyes o' a prowler, ye daft loon. Why dinna ye reason things oot f'r y'r ainsel' ? "

" Because," chortled Bucky, " ut's aisier to ask questions."

" Tha's it," rumbled Mac, " an' tha's why the world is full o' fules who can be led by the nose. Luk at mobs o' men in ceeties : they dinna trouble tae think oot the problems tha' govern their lives, they're too dommed lazy tae dae it ; they just buy a penny paper an' swallow a' it tells them, an' by an' by they lose the capacity tae think. The brain o' a mon is verra like the tail o' a dawg : eef ye put a dawg's tail in plaister o' Paris f'r a month, he canna wag it when ye set it free, an' eef a mon doesn'a dae his ain thinkin' f'r a year or twa, but lets some newspaper blighter dae it fer him, his mind, like a dawg's tail, becomes atrophied, until he canna reason wi' mair intelligence than a zoo-fed monkey, or talk better than a han'-raised parrot. Tha's why in every country here an' there a mon steps oot o' the ranks an' gangs tae the top ; the winners dae their ain thinkin', the ithers remain hewers o' wood an' drawers o' watter a' their born days, an', dom them, tha's a' they deserve. Physical laziness is bad, but mental laziness is th' curse o' creation. Th' generality o' mankind air made o' mud, an' a thinker can tweest them into any shape he wants 'em."

With a delighted grin, Bucky rose from the log he had been seated on during the morning meal. He had drawn his big comrade, and drawing Mac, or pulling his leg, as he phrased it, was a joy without ending to the Irishman.

"Phwat's doin' terday, pardner?" he demanded, as he stretched himself. "Is ut to be prospectin' or huntin'?"

"We'll just break camp, wee mannie, an' clam'er up yon mountain an' chance oor luck. A feel hum'le in speerit in the presence o' yon towerin' masses o' rock piled up till their topmast heights air lost in the clouds, an' A'm content tae tak' wha'ever the gods send. Eef it's a gold mine, A'll no say nay, eef it's a dozen valuable pelts tae fall tae oor guns, A'll no complain. A feel like a wee white lamb tha's willin' tae be led."

"A wee white lamb! Bedad, Mac, ye look the part to the loife, on me sinful soul ye do."

When Miracle understood that his white companions meant to penetrate the big mountains, he displayed extraordinary reluctance, and did his best to dissuade them from attempting the enterprise, and it was only when he saw that if he did not fall into step with them they would go without him, that he joined the party. All the time they were climbing up the craggy heights the black hunter displayed his anxiety by peering keenly at the heights.

"Oi'm thinkin' Miracle's not aisy in his mind, Mac," exclaimed O'Grady, when the sun was about three hours high.

"It's the plains below tha's callin' him," responded McGlusky. "Life doon there is easy f'r him an' his sort, an' he canna unnerstan' why we want tae do all this tough climbing when food's tae be got f'r the takin' on the level land."

"Shure, pardner, Oi'm a bit the same way av thinkin'."

"Ye ken the way doon," was the gruff response. "As f'r masel'," he added. "A've put ma fut in the furrow, an' A'll no tak' it oot till A've fulfilled ma purpose."

"Bein' Scotch, which is by way av being half-brother to a mule f'r stubbornness, Oi expected ye'd say something like that, Jamie McGlusky."

"Weel, ye wee grousin' beastie, ye've got wha' ye expected f'r yince, sae thank God an' be content. This is a gran' sight, noble an' fu' o' majesty," he added. "Look roon' ye, ma son—mountains a' roon' us stan'in' like God A'michty's silent sentinels." They were seated on a ledge high up above what had been their world the day before, and McGlusky, taking his hat off reverently, swept his free arm round the mighty spaces to emphasise his glowing words. "A'm a lover o' nature, an' a' tha's noble. It beats the handiwork o' man tae a frazzle. There's naething here, Bucky, but sweet peace an' holy calm an—— Ouch—heck—hell—Wha's tha'? Who th' blazes is hittin' ma wi' stanes? Miracle, ye spawn o' a scarlet wumman, A'll break every bone in y'r black hide, A wull tha'."

"Howly Mary, it's not Miracle, Mac, ut's—ut's—jumpin' Moses—ut's an army av—— Och, jump f'r ut, Mac, or we'll be kilt entirely."

McGlusky did jump, though he did so at the risk of his life. Before he did so he had swept one wrathful glance around and above, and what he had seen had shifted him from his resting place almost as quickly as a charge of gun-cotton would have done. O'Grady had jumped at the same moment, and the pair of them landed on a ledge far below, and both barely escaped going over the brow of a beetling precipice. As for Miracle, he was flying down the mountain slope at a pace that made him worthy of his name, and hard behind him travelled some forty or fifty tall, lean, hairy things, as black as himself. Sometimes the pursuers galloped on all fours, like dogs ; at intervals, however, they discarded this means of locomotion and covered the spaces on two legs. It was noticeable they always rose up when they came to a mass of boulders that crossed their track, and used their long muscular arms (?) to help them scramble over such obstacles. Once as McGlusky and O'Grady watched the pursuit, they saw one of the half-man-half-beast animals reach a ravine that it evidently felt was too wide for it to attempt to leap ; the creature paused, and wheeling, stood gnashing its big white teeth like some demon fresh loosed from Tophet, then, stooping, it raised a boulder about as big as a baker's loaf in its two hands, and slung this terrifying missile over the ravine and down the steep mountain side in pursuit of Miracle, who was travelling like a bookmaker's racehorse that has broken its bridle. The darkie heard the deadly missile thundering down behind him, and avoided it by leaping like a wild goat to one side, but he did not stop to make any song of triumph over his success, for he knew that where that one came from there were myriads of other boulders lying around loose. For a moment or two the man-like beast or beast-like man stood beating its hairy chest with its fists after it had missed its victim, then, with an amount of intelligence one would not have expected from its head formation, the creature, whatever it was, ran to a tree that overhung the ravine, and climbing up its trunk in monkey fashion, by using all four limbs, it soon reached a bough that jutted far out; along this branch the creature ran fearlessly, like an old-time seaman on the boom of a sailing ship; stopping suddenly, it twisted its long tail round the limb, as if it were a coil of living rope. So sure was the big beast of its tail grip, that it instantly dropped head downwards, and began to swing by its tail, and as it swayed violently, O'Grady exclaimed excitedly:

"By th' blind piper that played to St. Patrick, McGlusky, if that tail wud only break now, the hairy gintleman wud have a fall av about two thousand feet, bad cess to him. The tail wud be bruk if Oi was near enough to hit ut wid an axe."

"Eef ever A get hold o' th' blastie," growled Mac, "A'll cut the tail off an' beat him tae death wi' it."

The creature, having worked up all the momentum it required by swaying its long body to and fro, now loosed its tail grip and launched its frame clean over the ravine, landing upon all fours, like a cat. An instant later it was galloping down the mountain side in pursuit of the bushman hunter.

"Ut's me f'r the plains afther this, pardner," grumbled O'Grady. "The thruest words me auld mother ivver said to me was, 'Be content wid a lowly lot in life, me son; sure God niver intended yez f'r the high places.'"

McGlusky snorted disgustedly.

"Ye mean-spirited wee weaklin', dae ye mean tae say ye'd let a pack o' thing wi' tails drive ye oot?"

"Oi wud that, Mac, if Oi cud only see a way down. We're not popular in this part av Africa, pardner, an' Oi'm not wantin' ter stay where th' natives use a ten-pound lump av rock as a visitin' card. Oi've a lump on me left hip this blessed minute as big as a banjo, an'—— The Saints save us, Mac—luk there, an' there ; luk in between ivery blessed pair av rocks, an' tell me am Oi' dramin' ? "

Mac's eyes followed the directions indicated by his companion's quivering forefinger, and saw some hundreds of faces that looked weirdly human, and every pair of eyes in those faces was fixed malevolently upon him and the Irishman. Dark-skinned faces, with high cheek-bones, big bony overhanging brows and little pig eyes of piercing brightness ; the cheeks were covered with short hair, but underneath the jowls and chins there was a fringe of jet-black hair like nothing else in the world but whiskers and beards ; every face had a long thin upper lip and a decidedly cruel-looking lower lip, but the queerest thing about each face was the presence of two large, nearly white circles of flesh round the eyes, which looked at a distance as if every beast was wearing spectacles.

" Luk at the long upper lips av thim, Mac. Be the soul av me, Oi've niver seen anything so like th' Cassidys in all me born days, McGlusky."

" A'm dommed glad A didn'a ken y'r frien's th' Cassidys then, wee mannie."

" Oi mane th' Cassidys who lived in th' Kerry mountains between Cork an' the Lakes av Killarney th' black Cassidys they call thim, an' they all had top lips like thim—thim gintlemen hidin' in the rocks beyont there. Spake thim fair, Mac ; Oi'm damned sure they're human, an' maybe they understand phwat we're sayin'."

" Iphm—eef tha' big yin by the split rock ower there unnerstan's wha' we're sayin', he'll shift his ugly face in th' click o' an eyelid, f'r A'm goin' tae put a slug o' lead inta th' middle o' it tha' noo."

As Mac voiced this threat, he let his dexter hand slip to the butt of his Colt revolver, and as he did so every face that had been between the rocks disappeared as if a magician's wand had wafted them away like an evil dream.

"Mother av hivin," gasped O'Grady, "they heard yez, an' they understood phwat ye said, pardner. Ut's not f'r nothing they're like the Cassidys av Kerry."

"They heard ma wi' their eyes, ye daftie; they saw ma han' slip tae ma weapon. A ken a' aboot th' gomerals noo; they're th' long-armed apes maistly seen only in Central Africa. Th' natives say tha' when God made mon, th' deil in a fit o' jealousy tried his prentice han', but th' best *he* cud dae was tae turn oot a long-armed ape, an' these air some o' that yin's descendants, an' a dom nice breed they air, eef all A've heard aboot them is true. They ken mair than a lot o' men A've met. A believe they ainly let their tails grow so's they will nae hae tae work f'r a leevin'. They're weel-nigh as strong as gorillas, an' mair dangerous, because they gang aboot in gangs like baboons, an' anything they start oot tae hunt has a sair time o' it. A'd like tae catch yin an' tak' it back wi' ma tae Europe, f'r yin o' them hae never been tamed yet."

"Mac?"

"Weel?"

"Ye can have my share av the ape colony, if ye show me a way back to the plains."

"Got cold feet O'Grady?"

"Oi have that, McGlusky, an' phwat's more Oi'm cold feet all over."

Mac sniffed his disdain.

"There's no' much tae be feared o'," he growled. "We're weel armed, an' th' blasties will no' tak' us by surprise again. Let's awa' noo an' follow this ledge we're on, an' see where it will tak' us to."

The pair began to move onward and downward, keeping very close to the face of the wall of rock that ribbed their footway. Scarcely had they moved when a perfect torrent of stones and small boulders came hurtling down from the heights above, and nothing but the fact that the ledge on which they walked was somewhat overhung by the cliff above saved them from being battered to pulp by the cascade of falling rocks; as it was, a good many splinters of jagged granite found them, and O'Grady's language became as highly coloured as a Soudanese sunset. At every conceivable opportunity, McGluksy made attempts to send lead into one of the attackers, but, owing to the position he and O'Grady were in, he could only take rapid snapshots with his revolver, for he dared not expose sufficient of his body to bring his rifle into play, and he knew he was doing no damage.

"A canna get a chance at tha' blasties," he grunted. "They're as cunning as dingoes an' quicker than weasels."

"An' phwat's a dingo, Mac?" demanded O'Grady.

"Ye'd ken wha' a dingo is eef ye were raisin' sheep in the back o' Australia. A dingo's a thing shaped like a dog, wi' the cunning o' a hundred imps o' Hades, a full-grown dingo ha' forgotten more ways o' wickedness than an English fox or an American coyote ever knew hoo ta think aboot; it's as mean as a second-hand mustard plaster; it's a cross between a cooard an' a skunk; ye canna poison it, because it kens mair aboot poisons than a full-fledged chemist; it can ootrun a good horse an' ootwit a good hunter; it hasn'a th' spunk o' a woodlouse, an' it's as silent as sin—tha's a dingo."

The pair were standing on the ledge, with their backs pressed close to the wall of the ravine, whilst the rocks came bounding down from above, during the time McGlusky was expressing his opinion of dingoes.

"Mac——"

"Weel?"

"How long do ye think the gintlemen up above will kape bombardin' us wid rocks?"

"Put y'r silly head oot so as they can see it, an' ask 'em. Eef they dinna knock it aff, maybe they'll knock some sense inta it, or, as ye say they air a'michty like th' Cassidys o' Kerry, they'd recognise ye as one o' th' O'Grady clan, an' agree ta a truce. Ye've ma full permission ta try."

"Wid or widout yer consent, Oi'll not, Mac; the O'Gradys an' the Cassidys were niver on spakin' terms."

"Then haud yer blether an' stop axin' me fule questions. We'll just hae tae stop where we are until after dark, an' then chance breakin' oor necks clam'erin' oot o' this wi' na light tae guide us."

"Why won't the hairy gintlemen keep serenadin' us wid road metal all night, Mac? Tell me that now."

The big man sighed wearily.

"You mak me tired, wee mannie; your sort ought ta die o' watter on th' brain at birth, or be put ta rest in a bucket like a litter o' kittens an hoor after y'r mither's affrontit an ower-crowded world by bringin' ye inta it. Ye've been brought up in tha' wilds, an' ye canna theenk oot wilderness problems f'r yersel'. A've na wish tae affront ye, because a' th' rest o' ye is likeable enough, but O'Grady, th' A'michty meant y'r head f'r a door-knocker f'r a hoose o' ineequity, tha's why He made it ugly an' empty."

"Lave me face alone, Mac, an' answer a dacent question dacently."

"It wad answer itsel' eef ye'd think instead o' sperin' questions at ma. Ye ken as weel as A dae masel' tha' these mountains air fu' o' leopards an' panthers, an' those beasties air on the prowl as soon as night falls. Dae ye think the apes air no wise tae tha'? Dae ye think they will scatter aboot among the rocks after dusk where the big cats can pick them up as easily as chickens roosting awa' frae hame?"

"Bedad, Mac, ut's yerself that's a janius. Phwy didn't ye tell me that before, an' make me aisy in me mind ? "

McGlusky turned his eyes down upon the upturned face of the little Irishman.

" Does tha' mak' ye easy in y'r mind, wee mannie ? "

Something in the tone of the big fellow's voice sent a goose-flesh feeling down O'Grady's spine.

" Phwy shouldn't ut ? " he queried.

" Ye air no hard tae please, O'Grady, eef ye get joy oot o' the thocht tha' the big cats air just as likely tae pick us up as pick up the apes. Luk at the groond at yer feet, ma mate. Can ye no see tha' this ledge we air stan'in' on is a regular huntin' path f'r panthers? The soil is covered wi' their tracks. Eef we move oot in daylicht, we'll be pounded ta jelly wi' rocks, eef we stay till nicht falls, we'll likely be clawed tae slivers by a family o' cats ; we're between th' deil an' a sinkin' ship. A'weel, A'm goin' tae hae a peacefu' smoke ; it may be ma last, f'r the sun is sinkin'." As he spoke, the big man drew forth his pipe and charged it ; as he lit his tobacco he exclaimed with all his old cheerfulness under extreme difficulties : " Fill up an' smoke, Bucky. Theengs air never sae bad but they micht be worse, as yer mither must ha said when the nurse first showed her the ugly face ye'd brought wi' ye inta the world."

" Yez are a gintleman, McGlusky—God forgive me fer flirtin' wid the blessed truth, an' me so near me endin' ; the last thing Oi'll be seein' av yez in this wicked world, ye'll be smokin', an' the first Oi'll see av yez in th' next world, ye'll be burnin'."

" Dinna die bad-tempered, Bucky," grinned McGlusky. " A can see th' gates o' Heaven openin' a wee bittie, an' A'll go through fechtin' an ' All tak' yin or mair o' th' big cats wi' ma f'r company. A'll die like a good Anzac, but whiles A'm leevin' A'll be sweet an' gen'le o' speerit, as A've always tried tae be, f'r A hate a wrathfu' mon who canna meet tribulation wi' a licht heart an' a clean tongue."

As he spoke, McGlusky incautiously pushed his head outward from the rocky rampart he had been leaning against, and quick as a flash one of the beleaguering forces above dropped a rock in his direction. The missile did not strike his head, but it dashed his beloved pipe from his teeth, and cast the broken treasure on the trail at his feet, and as he stooped quickly to recover the broken idol, another large stone took him between the shoulders. As he scrambled to his feet and to safety, he raised his furious face upward, and lifted his two clenched hands above his head, and language gushed out of him. The ancient Israelitish prophet cursing the gods of Baal was a neophyte compared to him ; he cursed the ape tribe born and unborn, living and dead, sleeping and waking, eating and drinking, whilst Bucky O'Grady writhed in silent laughter and gasped with envy. When at last McGlusky paused, for sheer lack of breath, O'Grady, half choking with laughter managed to gasp :

" Don't spoil ut wid another cuss word, Mac darlint ; ut's—ut's a masterpiece as ut stands. Oi've heard cussin' from County Cork to the sinks av Shanghai, but you bate them all blind, darlint, you that wants ter die wid an angel temper an' a clane tongue. Faith, honey, if y'r tongue isn't clane now ut niver will be, f'r ye can't have another dirthy word left in yez."

At that moment something big, black and hairy came down the cliff, leaping, sprawling and snarling, something that looked like a cross between dog, devil and drunken dervish, a big-fanged, blazing-eyed parody of a man. It might have been the " missing link," but it didn't miss McGlusky, for part rolling, part leaping and sprawling, the creature launched itself right on to the chest of the brawny Scotch Anzac. Mac had just time to jerk his revolver from its holster and drive one bullet into the hairy body, ere he was hurled from his feet and dashed with terrific violence to the ground. As he fell, his revolver was jerked from his grasp, and then began a fight that in some respects was like a nightmare's dream. As McGlusky fell prone upon his back, the devilish thing was on top and astride him. A long black face, with eyes that gleamed redly and were circled by big white rings and pouches that looked like spectacles, glared down into the Scottish face. Instantly McGlusky reached up his two big sinewy arms, and his fingers buried themselves knuckle-deep in the hairy neck of his assailant. Swiftly and surely he felt for the apple of the throat, for many a rough hand-to-hand encounter by land and sea had taught him that that was the vulnerable point in man or beast. His fingers found what they sought, as his digits closed upon this fateful nerve centre, Mac, growling out his words as a lion growls out its wrath, exclaimed :

" Noo, ye imp frae Tophet, A'll squeeze y'r gullet in or pu' it oot," and he proceeded to make his words good, but the great beast, a chieftain amongst its clan, had not entered upon that enterprise with any intention of being a passive resister ; nothing that is worth a damn in this old world ever is a passive resister ; nothing that is worth its salt ever chooses the line of least resistance. That hairy, bespectacled, wire and whipcord image was not framed on passive resistance lines, and it had enough of the human instinct in it to know that the neck of anything that walked on two legs was the vulnerable point to attack. Savagely at first it tried to gouge Mac's big strong muscle-plated arms with its big white tusks, but McGlusky foiled all those attempts by wrenching and twisting the half-human brute's thorax with all the power that was in him. Swiftly the great ape realised that there was a high order of intelligence behind and controlling those two gripping hands. Reaching out its long arms, longer by half a foot than McGlusky's own, the creature sought to bury its prehensile fingers in the human thorax, but the great masses of McGlusky's beard foiled the brute's benign intentions. For a second or two, whilst the creature was vainly struggling to get the hold it sought, its face became as the face of a demon cast out of Hades; its lower lip fell away, and its top lip curled upward, leaving bare tusks and fangs that were murderous. Its big nostrils, the source of its tremendous vitality, opened and closed, emitting whistling sounds of demoniacal fury, and all the time its gnashing fangs spued foam into the face of the man below.

"Spit, ye blastie—A'll mak' ye spit blood afore A've done wi' ye," growled Mac. "Ye've bitten off mair than ye can chew this time, ye Ishmaelite."

There was a note of triumph in the Scottish voice, for he felt his fingers sinking deeper and deeper through the wiry hair and tough hide that guarded the throat of the thing he fought with, but the next moment the "missing link" changed its tactics. Finding the great matted beard foiled its efforts to reach the throat, it started out with both hands to make a clearing. Many unhappy moments had come into the life of McGlusky during his not uneventful career, but few were more pregnant with anguish than those which eventuated when the "missing-link" started to remove the herbage from his features. Burying its long, prehensile fingers in the matted beard, the creature put forth its strength and tore away handful after handful of that generous growth of hair with which nature had adorned Mac's classic countenance. For a minute or two, McGlusky bore the agony in grim silence, whilst he did all that was in him to throttle the life out of his assailant, but human endurance has its limits, and at last he yelled:

"Shoot th' spawn o' sin, O'Grady, shoot it. It's pluckin' ma like a gambler plucks a pigeon."

O'Grady heard the cry ring out, but he was helpless to come to his mate's assistance, for two other "missing links" had come piling down the cliffs on to the causeway only a moment or two after the first one had attacked McGlusky. They had reached the narrow ledge with cat-like leaps well away on the Irishman's left hand, and one behind the other had come bounding towards him on all fours. Fortunately for O'Grady, neither of the creatures had pounced straight down on him as the first arrival had done upon McGlusky. The gods of chance had singled the little man out as a recipient of their favours on that occasion, for as the beasts landed upon the causeway, his rifle had been in his hands, and Bucky, firing from the hip as McGlusky had taught him to do in an extreme situation, had sent an explosive bullet directly into the gaping mouth of his first assailant, and the major portion of the head of that animal was scattered upon the adjacent rocks.

With his clubbed rifle in his hands, the game and powerful little son of the Emerald Isle was beating back his other foe, whilst on the heights above them pandemonium was raging in the ranks of the ape army. Leaping, roaring, yelling, they bounded from rock to rock and from crag to crag, with demoniacal frenzy, as if working themselves up to a sufficient pitch of fury to launch themselves downwards to join in the fray. Had they done so, the fate of the two trail-blazers would swiftly have been settled, but for some reason known only to their half-developed intellectuality, they forebore to join in the assault.

It was not long before it dawned upon McGlusky that his mate, whose pluck and loyalty he had so often put to the acid test, could not for some reason render him assistance, and as soon as this fact was borne in upon his inner consciousness, his indomitable spirit of combat rose on the pinions of passion.

"Pluck me, wad ye? Root oot ma flowin' locks like flowers frae a garden, wad ye?"

He stiffened his left arm, tightened the fingers of that hand around the apple of the throat he gripped, and forcing the hairy head and hideous face upward and backward, he loosed his right hand. Clenching his fist, he banged it with all the might that was in him upon the ear that was more adjacent.

"Think ye're Dempsey, dae ye? A'll gie ye Dempsey."

This mode of attack must have been something new in the world to which the "missing link" belonged, for the clawing at McGlusky's face ceased, and the red eyes rolled under the big bony brows. "Bang" came another blow from the cast-iron fist, followed swiftly by another and another, and on the receipt of the third visitation, the creature tried to shake itself free, whilst it cast a yearning look upwards towards the heights from which it had descended to the attack.

"A'm dommed eef ye dae," roared McGlusky. "Ye cam' lookin' f'r a fecht, an' A'll gie ye a bellyfu' o' it."

Still clinging to his steel-like grip with his left hand, he wrestled himself to his knees, and from his knees to his feet, and once in that position the odds of height and weight were all in his favour. By this time McGlusky had become the prehistoric man. Time had rolled backward; he was fighting as the cavemen fought, before they learnt the use of weapons other than those supplied by nature. Forcing the head of the half-strangled "missing-link" hard back against the rocky wall, he drove his sledge-hammer right hand in under the heart with pulsing punches that brought forth moaning shrieks and yelps from the recipient.

The link clawed wildly and madly in its attempts to retaliate, but it had no power of punch, though the claws at the end of its fingers badly lacerated Mac's neck, chest, shoulders and arms, but ever the piston-rod like punches were driven home under the heart, and to the sound of his blows McGlusky growled through his gnashing teeth :

"Dempsey—A'll gie ye Dempsey, ye son o' an unmarrit mither."

Then, snatching a favourable opening and opportunity, Mac lifted his knee and drove it upwards, and a wailing howl from the link woke the mountain echoes near and far. The big body against the rock shivered violently ; the lower jaw fell until the cavernous mouth gaped, and a gurgling sound of strangling breath floated outward. Swift to seize an advantage, McGlusky dropped his hand from the creature's throat and, ducking low, clasped his corded arms around the link's waist, just above the hips, and, taking one swift backward step, he hurled the limp body over the precipice into space, and then for the first time he drew one deep, refreshing gush of air into his conjested lungs, and with his forearm dashed the blood from his eyes, and it was then that he saw the desperate straits his little mate was in, for O'Grady, with the life breath almost pumped out of him, was still standing with his back to a jutting rock, beating off with his clubbed rifle the fiend-like thing that kept leaping to the attack. Under normal conditions McGlusky's first action would have been to snatch up his own rifle and write finish to the fray, but all that was modern in his brain had come to a standstill ; æons of time seemed to have slipped away from him ; no remnant of civilisation remained in his inner consciousness ; he was just a white savage, stirred by the instincts and guided by the primeval forces that had belonged to men ere even the mountains had been created. With an inarticulate cry that was strangely akin to the sounds the "missing link" was making as it attacked O'Grady, McGlusky stooped and, picking up a boulder that took all his strength, he raised it high in his two hands above his head and, rushing straight at the monster, he hurled his missile full into the creature's chest, and the smitten beast fell as though an avalanche had struck it.

The rescue had only come just in time to save O'Grady, for he had drawn upon the last reserves of his strength, and as Mac turned towards him, the little man was down upon his knees, pulling in and exhaling big sobbing breaths, that told how near he was to the life limit. For a minute or two after the close of the encounter McGlusky was still the cave-man. His lapse into savagery had been too utter and complete for the civilised man to reappear instantly. He cast just one look in his mate's direction, and that glance told him that the little man was safe; then Mac, swelling out his chest, pranced up and down the causeway like a thing demented, shaking both his colossal fists at the ape army on the heights above, roaring forth wordless challenges, and the scared brutes, recognising in him something more savage even than themselves, crouched close to the rocks, and looked down upon him from their strangely bespectacled eyes, and not one of them attempted to roll a boulder down upon him, and it was whilst he was behaving like the wildest thing in the wilderness that the swift curtain of night fell upon the scene, as though nature were ashamed of this proof of the utter flimsiness of so-called civilising influences. Even the stars did not come forth for a wee while, as if they did not wish to realise that man, the so-called monarch of the world, is still at heart an unchained savage.

When realisation came back to McGlusky, he must have felt some slight tinge of shame for his unseemly exhibition of bestial instincts, for sitting by O'Grady with his arm around the little man, he murmured contritely:

"A'm hopin', Bucky, wee mannie, ye'll no judge y'r mate by wha' ye saw an' heard when the blood lust was on ma. A ken there are times, Bucky, when A'm nae fitted tae be called yin o' the Great Shepherd's wee lambs. At heart A'm gentle by nature, but there's a wee bittie o' th' auld Adam left in me yet, an' A'm thinkin' it'll nae come oot o' me except by fastin' an' prayer."

"Och, Mac, Oi'm fastin' an' Oi'm not loikin' ut, an' Oi'm hopin' we'll be gettin' off this ledge before we mate a divil av a tiger that's fastin' too. Oi'm Irish, but Oi've had a bellyful av fightin' f'r wan day. Ut's a bellyful av grub an' a paceful evenin' by a camp fire f'r Bucky O'Grady if he can get ut. Oi'm all av a thremble wid wakeness, an' me inside feels all on the outside. Oi'm——Phwat's that, Mac? Have Oi gone crazy wid wakeness?" Putting up one of his hands, he twisted Mac's badly shorn face in the direction he wished him to look, and the next moment he heard the big man gasp as though he too were startled out of his usual stoicism. "Phwat is ut, Mac darlint?"

"Search me," whispered McGlusky. "The deil tak' me eef A dinna think the little nigger, Miracle, was tellin' th' truth when he said these mountains were haunted. Dae ye ken a prayer o' any sort, Bucky?"

"Divil a bit av a prayer do Oi remember this minute, but if ye know wan, Mac, say ut now, if ut's only a Protestant wan, ut may do some good."

The happening that had stirred the two trail-blazers so intensely was the appearance of some fifty or sixty red lights that streamed upward through the darkness of the night like blood-red streamers. There was a long line of them winding around the base of an adjacent mountain. Some ten or twelve feet separated each crimson gleam from its neighbour, and not one of them remained still for a moment; sometimes one would whirl in a circle and make what looked like a wheel of flame, whilst all the rest bobbed up and down; at intervals one would shoot up in the air, and come down again, but none of them touched the earth.

"Ut looks like divils at play to me, Mac. Wirra wirra, Oi wish Oi was a day's march from these blasted mountains; ut's not me mother's son ye'd get here again wid a team av oxen."

"It's no' canny," answered McGlusky. "Eef A cud hear anything A'd feel better aboot it, but dinna fash aboot deils, maybe it's a natural phenomenon tha' wull explain itsel' in a wee while, but it is awesome an' eerie all those blood-crimson lichts dancin' in th' murk o' night, an' no' a whisper o' sound, or even th' howl o' a hill hyena or the snarl o' a panther. Wha'ever they air, they air comin' oor way, O'Grady."

"They are that, Mac darlint, an' ut's me that's goin' to bate a retrate an' chanst me luck in some other direction. Phwat wid missin' links wid spectacles in the daytime an' panthers an' leopards an' tree tigers an'—an'—" Bucky O'Grady stopped to cross himself piously—"an' red lights that look like eyes cookin' in hell, these mountains ain't homey enough f'r Bucky O'Grady. Come on away out o' this matey."

"No, till A ken wha' yon lichts air."

"Do, honey. Oi've seen the blue lights dancin' on the bogs in Kerry whin Oi was a spalpeen, an' don't iverywan know thim blue lights are the spirits av the damned?"

"These lichts are no blue, Bucky, they're red."

"Phwat difference does tha' make, Mac? Sure the colour may only be a matter av climate. Come on; get a move on, Mac; Oi can feel me innards rattlin' like dice in a box."

At that moment a long-drawn cry, shrill, clear and far-reaching, broke the stillness, and O'Grady, who was as full of superstition as a crow is of croaking, cried in a voice that quavered :

" Blessed Mary! Hark to the banshees callin', Mac ! "

" Banshees be dommed," almost shouted McGlusky. " It's Miracle giein' us a cry, an' it's th' wee nigger an' his hunters tha' hae come tae seek f'r us."

Rising to his feet, the big man made a trumpet of his hands, and then he loosed a " coo-e-e-e " that made the echoes ring, and at that sound the red lights on the mountain slope were waved frantically, and more than one was tossed high in air and caught in clever hands as they came down.

Soon the good little bushman and his friends were swarming up on the ledge where the two white men stood, and each carried the deadly bow of the tribe in one hand and a great blazing torch in the other, and Miracle explained to McGlusky that even so strong a party of his tribesmen would not venture from camp in the black mountains without a plentiful supply of torches after sundown, for it was not only the great cats on the prowl that they feared, but the peculiar brand of devils which, according to their belief, made the vast rocky fortresses their abiding places. Mac was half-inclined to scoff at their fantastic belief, until Miracle explained that the devils were some kind of half-cousins to the missing links ; then, however, Mac, remembering the encounter with the " link " on the ledge, was less sceptical, for, he remarked to O'Grady :

" Eef the things th' bushmen fear tae meet o' nichts are any worse than th' blastie A met in daylight, then they're deils aricht."

The whole party camped where they were until morning, and, being strong enough in numbers, they decided upon a pitched battle with the bespectacled apes on account of the attack made upon Miracle, for in all Africa, North or South, East or West, there is no race or tribe more revengeful than the rapidly dwindling bushman. At the first signal of the coming dawn their ablest and boldest skirmishers were afoot, spying out the land; they were very wary, those little hunters, for they knew that they themselves were being watched by lynx-eyed foes. At the full of the dawn McGlusky was having a look over the spot where the previous day he had fought his Homeric fight, when his eyes fell upon something in the face of the rock against which he had battled, that now took his attention and woke his prospector's instincts.

Carefully he examined the rock, breaking a lump off here and there, and when at last he rose to an upright position there was in his badly mangled face a look of exultation, and in his fierce eyes a wild gleam of long hoped-for triumph. Clutching a ten-pound chunk of rock in one hand, he lifted the remnants of his toil-stained hat from his head, and raised it reverently to the morning skies, and as he did so his big chest, covered with wounds from his conflict with the " link," heaved and swelled and fell and heaved again; then slowly, solemnly, words came sonorously from his lacerated lips.

" A'm thankin' Thee, thou gi'er o' gifts for a' Thy ten'er mercies. Little did Thy servant dream when th' blastie i' th' shape o' a missin' link cam' squallin' an' tumblin' doon this mountain side, seekin' a fecht tae th' death wi' ma, that it were but a hum'le instrument in Thy han's tae open th' eyes o' Jamie McGlusky tae th' grandest an' th' biggest platinum mine in a' the world. Gi'er o' gifts, forgie ma f'r no comprehendin' Thy plan, but th' blastie didna' gie ma much time f'r cool thocht when he was tearin' at ma gullet, an' A had tae deal faithfully wi' him."

He lowered his eyes and let them rest in ecstasy on the mighty mass of rock nearby, all of which was pregnant with the precious metal that the world so badly needs.

" Solomon in a' his glory never struck a patch like this. He foond gold an' siller an' precious stanes, but the world cud dae wi'oot those things, but it canna dae wi'oot platinum. Come here, O'Grady, an' see wha' th' A'michty hae gied us. We'll hae money enough tae build a ceety here, an' we'll ca' it ' The Missin' Link.' A'll build a temple on yon hill, an' a hospital in th' valley beyond, an'—an'——"

" Och," chortled O'Grady, " an' me, Oi'll build a brewery, an' sit on the front sthep av ut an' sample th' contents all day."

CHAPTER VIII

FORTUNE FOLLOWS MCGLUSKY

SO enraptured were the two trail-blazers with the wonder of their discovery of the platinum mine, that for a little while they forgot all about the battle that had been planned by the bushmen with the ape army but the return of a couple of the skirmishers bringing the news that large numbers of the missing links were assembling in the mountains nearby the bushmen's camp made them realise that there were other things besides fortune finding to be considered.

" A'm no wha' ye micht ca' o' a verra venomous disposition, wee mannie," said McGlusky when this news reached his ears, " but," he added, "A'm thinkin' it wull be tae the guid o' everybody an' everythin' in this neighbourhood eef those long-tailed vermin wi' spectacles were gien a lesson tha' will no pass oot o' their memories f'r a generation, an' eef A'm no mistaken oor frien's the bushmen are o' the same opinion, so come awa' wi' ye, an' let's get intae the thick o' it."

The big fellow was rather surprised when he joined the main body of the bushmen, to discover what a workmanlike lot the little hunters were, and how fully they were seized with the importance of securing every advantage in regard to the place in which the coming conflict should be decided. Quickly and graphically Miracle pointed out that the missing links always made a point of securing ground on the mountain tops, or as near the top as possible, so that they could roll down boulders on any enemy, four-footed or two-footed, with whom they might be engaged. The intelligence of the half-human apes had not been sufficiently developed to teach them how to make or properly handle any kind of weapons, but they had the primal instincts which taught them that rocks hurled down hill would maim or kill, and woe to anything that they crippled with such missiles, for when this did happen either to man or panther, a posse of them would charge down in a body and rend the unfortunate cripple asunder. McGlusky, who always had the sense to listen attentively to any natives with whom he contacted, when they talked either of war or hunting, gave an attentive ear to all that Miracle had to say to him, and when the little bushmen had finished, Mac remarked to O'Grady :

" Bucky, ma mate, ye said when ye first saw the faces o' the missin' links, wi' their long upperlips an' high cheek-bones, they reminded ye o' the Cassidys o' Kerry Mountains, an' A'm no wunnerin' at it noo. A hear wha' Miracle says aboot the fightin' tactics o' the links. They're mair than half human, an' maybe, O'Grady, when we start fechtin' ye may be goin' intae war, wee man, against the primal progenitors o' the clan Cassidy."

This reflection upon his own race somewhat stirred the bile of Bucky O'Grady, and he retorted tartly :

" Och, Mac, if the bespectacled divils didn't have tails, there's more than wan av them that Oi saw yesterday that moight pass muster as members av the clan McGlusky, if yez only put thim into kilts."

" A'weel," murmured Mac placidly, " McGlusky's, Cassidys or O'Gradys, it doesn'a matter whose forbears they were ; they've started tae fecht, an' we've got tae see it through, so come on. A'm thinkin' it's no goin' tae be a yin-sided battle. There goes a dozen o' the little hunters up yon'er moontain side awa' tae the left, an' aboot the same number are scalin' the same heights on the richt han' side, an' Miracle is musterin' a posse richt there i' the centre. A'm thinkin' the twa flankin' pairties are bein' thrown upward tae draw the missin' links awa' tae the richt an' the left, an' whiles they're busy on baith sides, Miracle an' his pairty wull mak' a' the speed they may tae the moontain top along the middle path. The intelligence o' the bushmen will ower-match the brute strength an' the num'ers o' the links."

"An' phwat are we to be doin', Mac? Are we to stand here bitin' our thumbs, while the foightin's going on?" exclaimed O'Grady, his hot Irish blood on the boil.

"Nae, nae," responded Mac coolly, as he chewed on a generous wedge of tobacco, "we'll follow as close as may be behind Miracle an' his stormin' pairty. Ye ken their bows willna carry their poison arrows verra far, an' ye may bet y'r bonnet the links are wise tae tha' fac', f'r the war between them an' the bushmen is ages auld."

"Well, phwat av ut?"

"Naething, except that marchin' behind Miracle's stormin' pairty ye an' masel' can clear the way f'r them wi' oor far-reachin' rifles. A dinna think masel' it wull tak' us long tae dislodge the links frae this stronghold. Rifles are new tae them, an' eef they get panicky an' bolt headlong doon the mountain sides, as A'm thinkin' they wull, the bushmen's bows wull work havoc wi' them, f'r wherever an arrow breaks the skin there wull soon be a dead link lyin' roon' tae mak' food f'r the ravens. Every arrow in every quiver was dipped in the poison o' the black mamba; A saw them daein' it last nicht. Those little bushmen are goin' tae mak' a killin' the day. It's no tha' they want these moontains, f'r they dinna, but it riles them tae think tha' somethin' wi' a tail dares tae mak' war on them."

In a very few minutes events proved that McGlusky had diagnosed the plan of battle correctly. The links on the mountain top watched the advance of the two skirmishing parties on the right and left of their stronghold, and when the proper moment arrived, they used their enormously long arms as catapults and sent rocks that an ordinary man could not have shifted without a crowbar, bounding down the rocky slopes. As the advancing bushmen had foreseen just such tactics, they immediately took cover under overhanging ledges or behind large boulders which protected them from the avalanche of rocks that came thundering from the heights above. The apes massed near the summit were concentrating all their attention upon the two flanking parties, and it was then that Miracle and his section made their desperate move forward. So well was this cunning attack planned, and so deftly carried out, that Miracle's party followed by McGlusky and O'Grady, had advanced far up the height before the links became aware of this new danger. When they did discern it, they had not sufficient mentality to realise that it was part and parcel of a co-ordinated plan—they were not humans, they were only links. The new peril seemed to drive them into a perfect frenzy of fury, which it would not take a great deal to turn into a panic, a fact which was instantly borne in upon McGlusky's acute intelligence.

"A'm thinkin', Bucky," he cried exultantly, "it wull no tak' long tae stampede this mob on the top."

As soon as the links began to rain down boulders on the central party, Miracle and his men took cover, knowing well that the two flanking parties would immediately advance upward, as soon as rocks ceased to fall in their direction. It was the human brain outmanœuvring that of the half-brute. McGlusky and O'Grady, kneeling behind craggy projections that screened them from injury, fired their rifles simultaneously, and two of the links fell, the one in McGlusky's line of fire lying motionless, the other rolling over and clawing and biting at its flesh, whilst the mountains reverberated to the sound of the guns. The unaccustomed noise of the firearms, the sudden flashes of flame and spurts of smoke, and the fall of two of their number seemed for a moment or two to petrify the commando of the apes. For a moment or two they ceased the downward rain of rocks, and, dropping from the upright position which most of them had adopted, they began to run to and fro on all fours, like wolves, or to bound from crag to crag. One big fellow, who seemed to be something of a leader, launched himself on to the broken bole of what had once been a giant tree, and, balancing himself with wondrous skill and agility, the almost human thing stood looking up towards the skies which were flawlessly blue and cloudless, a fact which seemed to cause the ape leader profound astonishment. In all its life-history it had only known thunder to come and lightning to strike from clouded skies, and, to the creature's limited intelligence, the sound of the rifles could only mean thunder and the spurts of flame the lightning that destroys.

"Yon creature," murmured McGlusky in his sententious way, "looks like a general, an' A'll gie him the honour o' dyin' by tha' han' o' a mon who wadna mak' a bad general himsel'. Noo, ma hairy frien', A'm goin' tae send ye west. Maybe we'll meet i' the next worl' an' be guid frien's. A'm bearin' nae malice; wha' A'm daein' the noo is by way o' bein' ma duty. We're baith but the children o' circumstances."

He touched the trigger as he uttered the last word, and Bucky O'Grady, who had sighted a bespectacled face peering down at him from over the top of a rock, fired at the same moment, and the reports and the deadly effect put the wind completely up the wild mob on the mountain crest. This was something entirely new in their scheme of things. Panic took hold of them, and they bounded pell mell away to right and left, forgetful or careless of the storming parties in either direction, and as the wild things leapt and scrambled down towards the gorges, the bushmen poured arrows into them with a speed and sureness that was uncanny, for at short range the little men were deadly in the accuracy of their aim.

" By heck," exclaimed O'Grady, " ut's meself that's glad entoirely Oi'm not wan av thim things that's got to run the gauntlet av that stream av poisoned arrows. Luk at thim, Mac ; just a bit av an arrer sthickin' into thim that don't look more to worry over than the quill av a porcupine, an' thin half a dozen blunderin' leaps an' bounds, an' they're down an' out."

When the struggle was over, the little bushmen sauntered carelessly enough from one dead body to another, recovering their arrows, which only needed to be re-tipped with mamba venom to be ready to take another life.

" Ut's a foine feast they're leavin' f'r the ravens this day," commented O'Grady, " an' divil a bit av a fuss do these pigmy men make av phwat they've done."

" Why should they make a fuss ? " was McGlusky's answer. " It's a' in the day's work f'r them ; from childhood to manhood, frae father tae son, frae generation tae generation, these things hae been goin' on, an' no war correspondents present tae mak' a song aboot it. A'weel, A'm thinkin' the hairy gentlemen wi' spectacles hae had a lesson they'll no forget. Eef they hadna been sae dommed quarrelsome they'd no hae met wi' this slaughter."

"Did yez notice phwat foine powerful craythurs the spectacle craythurs were, Mac?"

"A did," said McGlusky. "A'm no a weaklin' masel', but it wad hae ta'en me a' ma time tae han'le some o' the boulders they lifted up ower their heads an' tossed doon the mountain side like pebbles. It's a sair waste o' guid material tae see sic guid labour machines runnin' aboot the mountains, daein' naethin' but create disorder frae birth tae buryin'. A'll look intae this matter, O'Grady, when we've got oor platinum mine fairly started. Maybe eef we catch a lot o' them young, an' perform a surgical operation wi' a tomahawk by removin' the tails o' each o' them close up tae the back-bane, we may be able tae turn them intae usefu' miners. We wad be playin' the pairt o' Providence, ye ken, by ceevilisin' the creatures, an'—an' gettin' cheap labour. Ye'd look weel han'lin' a bunch o' them, Bucky; they'd hardly ken ye frae yin o' themsels'."

O'Grady looked very hard at the colossus, as if seeking to read from the expression on his battered countenance whether McGlusky meant his remarks as a compliment or an insult. Finally he said, touching himself several times quickly on the chest with a bent forefinger:

"Me, McGlusky? Bucky O'Grady thrin' to handle a team av thim hairy gents, an' gettin' worrk out av thim? Axin' y'r pardon, but Oi'll see ye damned first, an' them wid tails or widout tails. Oi tried to handle wan av thim yesterday, an' Oi saw wan av thim handlin' you. If ye have a job of that kind to spare on the platinum mine, do ut yerself, ye reformin' cranky Scotchman. Oi'll start a brewery, as Oi told yez, an' attend to the dhrinks."

Following the fray with the apes, McGlusky, by the aid of his compass, took the bearings of his newly discovered mine, and, having drawn a rough sketch of the country in his note-book, he jotted the bearings down, remarking to his comrade :

" This time, wee mannie, we'll mak' nae mistakes. We won't lose this as we lost the diamon' field ; neither mon nor wine, nor wummun shall corkscrew this information frae McGlusky, O'Grady & Co."

Poor little Bucky, who even to that moment had never suspected Mac's real part in the loss of their first great discovery, reached out a hand, and stroking one of his partner's big fists, said beseechingly :

" Faith, Mac, don't throw thim diamonds in the face av me. Oi know Oi was a baste an' a blackguard to let ye down as Oi did, but Oi've tried to make up to yez for ut. Don't make me eat dirt, pardner."

Two red spots instantly burnt themselves vividly just under McGlusky's cheek-bones. Taking the little man by both shoulders, he held him far away from him, whilst one pardner looked up and the other looked down into two hard-bitten faces ; then Mac said solemnly :

" Wee mannie, wad ye like tae spit i' the face o' Jamie McGlusky ? "

" Oi wad *not*," almost shouted O'Grady.

" An' why no'? " queried McGlusky, with a strange quiver in his voice.

" Why not ? F'r wan thing, Oi want t'r die aisier than that, and f'r another, why should Oi spit in the face av the foinest mate Oi've iver had, a man who niver did a mane thing, or thought a mane thought in all the days av him ? "

Then still holding O'Grady by his two shoulders, and stooping so that each could peer into the eyes of the other, McGlusky told his mate in detail the true and undiluted story of how the diamond find was lost. When the recital ended, the Irishman stamped round the adjacent scenery, whirling his arms and yelling with laughter.

"Bedad, Mac, ye are the divil's own brother-in-law or next av kin. 'Wummen an' whisky will be the undoin' av yez, O'Grady,' says you to me the day Oi started to take out thim papers, an' ut was a thrue worrd, but bedad, Mac, ut wasn't a scarlet wumman, but a wumman in white wid scarlet lips, an' bad brandy, that made yez come unstitched, an' betwane us we lost a fortune that would have bought all the race horses in Ireland."

That evening just before sundown, whilst the black hunters under Miracle's command were preparing their bivouacs, a strong contingent of women arrived upon the scene, and O'Grady remarked:

"How the divil did they get to know just where to find their men in these mountains, Oi wonder, Mac? They couldn't have come much quicker or much straighter if they'd been on the end av a telephone."

"Smoke signals or smoke messages, whichever ye like tae ca' them, matey. A've been expectin' them masel' the last hoor, f'r A saw Miracle on the moontain top makin' magic wi' smoke spirals, an' A kenned he was sendin' messages an' gettin' replies. They're wunnerfu', these sae-called savages i' their ain way."

Suddenly O'Grady began to chuckle.

"Wha's makin' ye bubble inside?" demanded Mac, as he looked down on the little man, who was sitting cross-legged like a tailor on a rock at his feet.

For answer, the Irishman, pointed an eloquent finger and laughed derisively. Turning his eyes in the direction indicated, McGlusky saw the slim and shapely figure and far from unpleasing face of the slender slip of a girl who in the early days of the white men's relationship with the bushmen had followed McGlusky about very much like his own shadow.

"She's in full dhress this toime, Mac," gurgled the Irishman.

"Iphm—is she? A'm no noticin' any great superfluity i' the matter o' claes. She had as much on when she were born as she has at this meenit."

"Och, then y're wrong, Mac; she's carryin' a huntin' assegai in wan hand an' the feathers av a bird av some sort in the other, an' that's full dhress for a daughter av a chief av a huntin' tribe. She's half girl, half wumman, an' takin' her by an' large, from the crown av her head to her little fate, ye would be hard put to it to match her f'r size, make an' shape the wide world over. Luk at her, Mac."

"A'll dae naethin' o' the kind," snarled McGlusky.

"An' phwy not? She's as God Almighty made her, Mac."

"*That's* why," chortled McGlusky, but in spite of his protest against looking in what he considered a forbidden direction, McGlusky permitted his eyes to roam over the dusky figure that, as O'Grady phrased it, was dressed in an assegai and a bunch of feathers.

"She's like naething," he murmured, "but a slen'er black lily."

"Och, Oi've heard av a black tulip, but niver in me born days before did Oi hear av a black lily—but lily or tulip, she's a wonder in her own way, an' she's atin' you wid her eyes, Mac. It's strange," added the Irishman, "strange how thim little slender slips av wimmen go crazy afther great hulkin' giants like yerself. It doesn't matter whether they're white, or brown, or yellow, ut's always the same. Now phwy doesn't she fall in love wid meself, Mac? Now tell me that."

For reply, McGlusky cast sardonic glances at the really ugly face of the little Irishman.

"Eef that's meant f'r a conundrum, O'Grady, it's an easy yin tae answer. The reason she didna fa' in love wi' ye is because she's no' blind."

"Faith," laughed Bucky, "ut's yerself that was no' hand-paintin' before the missin' link did things to y'r face. Ye look now as if a mule had lamed utself knockin' the corners off y'r granite face, but f'r all that, ye are a moighty foine figure av a man."

"A'm nae sae bad," cooed McGlusky, preening himself, "but deil tak' the wench stan'in' there i' the fadin' sunlight i' a' her nativity. A wish she'd hike oot o' this. She's a disturbin' influence, an' A'm no' wantin' tae be disturbit the noo; it's oor future A'm wantin' tae be thinkin' aboot, Bucky; we've a fortune at oor fingers' ends, eef we han'le it properly. Just gang an' shoo the lassie awa' tae her ain people."

"Do yer own dirthy worrk," grinned O'Grady. "Oi'll ask yez this now. Phwy should Oi make an enemy f'r meself out av the wench by shooin' her away? Ut's not meself she's afther; ut's yerself she's huntin', big pardner."

McGlusky tried to frown his grinning companion into silence, but the more he frowned, the more Bucky leered up at him impudently. The Black Lily had been inching towards the pair of white men all the time they had been discussing her, and now that she was within a foot or two of the big adventurer, there was no doubting the meaning of the glances with which she enveloped him.

"Bucky——"

"Well, Mac?"

"What shall A dae wi' it? She seems brimmin' ower wi' the milk o' human kindness. Eef A drive her awa' wi' harshness, maybe she'll turn a' her people against us, an' we canna afford that. Eef we dae, we'll lose oor mine, f'r the bushmen control this pairt o' the country, an' we must work amicably wi' them' or they'll drive us oot."

"Bedad, Mac," chuckled O'Grady, "phwy not marry the lady? She's a chief's daughter, an' the ceremony won't cost yez a Scotch saxpence. Just take wan av her hands in y'r big paw an' jump over y'r own shadder wid her, an' Oi'll proclaim yez man an' wife. Oi've been married several toimes meself wid less ceremony."

"Shut the ribald mooth o' ye. Dae ye think A'd be makin' a naked savage wumman Mrs. Jamie McGlusky?"

"Och, if ut's the clothes ye're grumblin' aboot, phwy don't ye dress her?" said the Irishman, in whom the imp of mischief was running riot.

"Claes—claes! Whaur wad a mon get claes f'r a wumman frae i' these moontains?" Snatching up his rifle, McGlusky strode off, flinging over his shoulder: "A'll leave it tae ye, Bucky, tae get rid o' the wumman before A return frae my huntin'," and the night was setting well in before he returned to the bivouac that had been his and O'Grady's.

When he did get back, he stepped cautiously with the soft tread of the practised hunter, and then he saw a sight which made his few remaining whiskers bristle. Miracle and all his people, male and female, were squatted round McGlusky's bivouac fire, which had been built up to large dimensions, and every black face wore a grin. Standing in the firelight, a few feet away from the blaze, was the Black Lily, looking inexpressibly vain of herself. In her woolly hair, just over one ear, was fixed by the aid of a strand of thin trapper's wire, a bunch of scarlet berries. By the damsel's side knelt Bucky O'Grady, putting the finishing touches to her toilet. Around the jet-black waist the Irishman had drawn a circle two inches deep with white clay; three inches lower down he had drawn another circle with the same material and so on down to the shapely knees. The white rings with the glossy black skin showing in between each, might at a distance have passed for the hoops of a crinoline, and so thought McGlusky, as he gazed upon this queer conceit of his impish Irish friend.

" There," chortled O'Grady, as he rose to his feet and walked with grinning face round and round the maiden, surveying his handiwork. " Yez only want a frame now, darlint, an' ye'd be fit to hang in the Royal Academy. If McGlusky don't loike yez in yer crinoline, ut's meself that'll give up the job av decorator-in-chief to the thribe. Ye only want a parasol an' a parrot now to make yez perfect."

Bucky was talking and jabbering away, all unheeding the fact that neither the Black Lily nor any of her tribesfolk could understand a word he was saying, but if they could not understand his language, they fully comprehended the meaning of his skeleton crinoline, and its limitations convulsed them with merriment.

McGlusky, standing back in the shadows all unheard by the natives or his impish mate, was taking stock of the whole proceedings.

" A'weel," he murmured into the hollow of the palm of the hand he had held up to his mouth while surveying the scene. " A'weel, O'Grady, ye've solved the question o' civilisin' the wildest breed o' blacks in a' Africa. Eef we can get them intae claes, we'll soon get them buildin' decent huts f'r hames, an' hae them tillin' farms o' their ain an' growin' mealies an' breedin' cattle an' living like peacefu' folk, but A was gey dootfu' eef the wild wee fechtin' an' huntin' buckies an' their does wad ever tak' tae claes, but yin step at a time. Eef they'll stan' tae hae claes painted on them, wi' a wee bittie o' patience an' plenty o' time, we'll get them tae wear the real thing, an' A'll hae ma platinum mine in the midst o' a well-behavit, well-dressed an' peace-lovin' people. A'm dommed eef A thocht Bucky O'Grady had the genius tae think o' such a solution o' a problem A had rackit ma brains in vain tae solve. Weel, weel, even a fule can succeed sometimes whaur great minds fail, an' A'll gie him his reward, since his heart seems set on the wee Black Lily. She's black but comely, an' a mon who's had eleven wives ought no' tae find much difference in this yin because o' her colour." Striding forward he broke through the circle, and stood in the camp fire's blaze. "Weel done, richt weel done, Bucky," he shouted, clapping his big left hand down in brotherly if heavy fashion between the Irish shoulders. "Mon," he exclaimed, walking round the Black Lily. "A'm dommed eef ye've no made her looked like a zebra." Holding his chin in his left hand, and clutching the elbow of that arm in his right hand, he surveyed his comrade's handiwork approvingly, nodding his big head now and again as he did so. "Iphm—by wha' name wad ye be callin' the Black Lily's ootfit, Bucky, eef ye were puttin' it on a fashion plate?"

"Phwat name would Oi be callin' ut by? Phwat name would ut be called but her weddin' outfit? Shure an' it's airy an' graceful an' dainty an' nate, an' as chape as chalk, f'r these mountains are full av that white clay."

"A weddin' ootfit? Loch, ma laddie ye've named it weel, an' noo f'r the weddin'." Gripping hold of one of Bucky's wrists, he drew the Irishman forward, exclaiming: "Noo, ye deil's spawn, embrace y'r bride."

"Howld on there, Mac, or 'twill be a wake an' not a weddin' ye'll be attendin'. The Black Lily don't understand a worrd av phwat we've been sayin', but she's guessed y'r manin' plain enough. Luk at the way she's grippin' her huntin' assegai. Ut's meself that'll be gettin' six inches av steel betwane me ribs if Oi put a hand on her. She's ready enough f'r a bridal, but only wid the man she's been shadowin' ever since we joined up wid the tribe."

Heedless of what the little man had said, McGlusky determined at all hazards to carry out the plan which had entered into his brain, and give the Black Lily in bridal to his mate, he clutched the damsel by one of her slender wrists and jerked her forward unceremoniously, exclaiming :

" Grup haud o' her ither hand, Bucky, an' Oi'll pronoonce a benediction ower the pair o' ye. She's black but bonny, an' a'thegither desirable f'r a mate far too gentle an' sweet a lamb f'r an auld he-goat like yersel'."

The Black Lily suddenly squirmed fiercely, wrenching both her hands free. The next moment she had swung her assegai and brought the flat of it down with stinging force across one of McGlusky's cheeks, and then instantly she bounded away into the shadows.

" Weel, A'm dommed," growled Mac, rubbing his cheek ruefully. " A dinna seem tae get ma fair share o' thanks f'r tryin' tae set things richt in this wicked world." Then, wagging a finger menacingly in the direction the damsel had taken when she fled, he cried : " A said ye were a lamb, ye besom. A lamb ——" He ran his hand across his stinging cheek. " Dressed or no' dressed, ye're no lady, ye step-daughter o' the deil."

The big fellow slept late the next morning, for the exertions of the previous day had left him, as he expressed it a " wee bittie leg weary." When he arose, the first sight that met his eyes was a whole group of the bushman damsels arrayed in white clay crinolines, for O'Grady had been up and busy at the dawn. Such an escapade suited his impish soul right down to the ground, and the girls, like their sex the world over, were more than ready to embrace some new fashion or to be embraced in it.

" A'll leave ye tae it," growled McGlusky to his mate. " Ye've got a job after yer ain heart. A appoint ye dressmaker-in-chief tae the whole tribe, an' may the deil gie ye joy o' y'r job."

Having the itch of exploration upon him, Mac took

Miracle and half a dozen hunters, and started off to look into the surrounding country. The men went cheerfully, for they had no fear of further molestation from the almost human missing links, those bespectacled creatures having received too severe a lesson on the previous day. After about a couple of hours' tramp, Mac and his party came to a peculiarly shaped mountain, that by some freak of the forces of nature had been completely isolated from the chain of mountains, and it was so situated that it was bathed in gorgeous sunshine. The whole face of this great natural structure from the ground upwards was honeycombed with caves, just as if a race of giants in prehistoric times had used it as a gigantic dovecote. For miles around, the country was aglow with a wondrous wealth of wild flowers of all colours and kinds; creeping plants had entwined themselves around the trees, and bell-shaped flowers hung down in beautiful disarray from thousands of branches, flowers that ran through the whole gamut of the world of colour, from royal purple lined upon the inside with old gold, to daintiest pink and white. Scented honeysuckle clustered on the hillsides like golden gorse on Scottish heights; wild verbena ran riot in all directions, and Mac, who in spite of the ruggedness of his nature was a colour-lover, stood entranced.

"A'weel, a'weel," he murmured, "A'm thinkin' the master artist who mak's the rainbows and the sunsets must hae spilled his colours here an' set the earth aglow."

In and out amidst this world of living colour flitted a perfect army of little brown birds, twittering gaily as they darted from honeysuckle to verbena and from verbena to bell-like plants that clung to the trees.

"A ken ye weel," muttered the big fellow, whilst an almost boyish smile illuminated his battered features, " ye wee brown pretty things. Ye are the honey birds o' Africa, an' whaur ye are in sic numbers there'll be bees by the million hivin' their honey."

He strolled up a small incline, and there paused to look down upon a beautiful pool of water that glistened in a basin of pure white quartz. An African willow tree drooped gracefully over one edge of the lakelet, and, perched upon a dry bough, were a pair of black and white kingfishers. Grotesque in shape, the beautiful markings of the birds made them of uncommon interest to such a naturalist as McGlusky.

" Eef y're no' the ain cousins tae the laughin' jackass o' ma ain country o' Australia, then A'm a daftie," he murmured. " Ye're the same shape an' make, but a hunner' times mair pleasin' tae the eye, ye white an' black beauties."

Just then, as if to prove that Mac was correct in relating the mammoth kingfisher of Africa to the laughing jackass of Australia, one of the birds dropped from its bough into the water like a plummet, and reappeared with a small golden-coloured fresh-water fish locked in the vice-like grip of its powerful beak, whereupon its mate set up a perfect din of cackling chattering and laughter, which brought another pair of the species from some neighbouring habitat, and soon the world was alive with cachinnations that filled the air with such a volume of sound that it seemed incredible that so much noise could come from so small a source.

" Ye're pretty in y'r ain way," murmured the giant, " but like so many pretty things we meet in life, ye're ower noisy f'r y'r ain good. It wadna be weel f'r ye the noo eef A were yin o' those fule naturalists who canna see a beautiful specimen o' leevin' nature wi'oot wantin' tae kill it an' stuff it tae put i' a glass case wi' a label on it. Ye're safe frae me. God A'michty made ye, an' the life He put intae ye cam' frae the same source o' life that He put intae ma ainsel'. We're baith useful an' baith innocent o' harm in oor ain ways. Life is life in bird or beast or mon ; whaur it comes frae it gangs back tae."

Just then one of the male kingfishers shot from its perch like an arrow sped from a bow, and skimmed low over a large bed of verbena in full flower, suddenly striking downwards, and seemingly without pausing in its flight, it rose again with something in its beak that wriggled and squirmed, vainly trying to lift its length to wrap its coils round the body of its feathered captor, but the bird had struck too wisely and too well to let the reptile turn and carry out this manœuvre. The captive was one of the small and slender snakes that resemble a whip lash when lying prone on the earth ; small as they are, they are very deadly, as no one knew better than McGlusky, who watched the denouement of the duel with vivid interest, for there was nothing on earth this big man loathed worse than the whole reptile family. With swiftly fluttering pinions the giant kingfisher lifted itself upward until it was almost so far aloft that its actions became blurred, then, however, it turned swiftly head downwards, dropped its prey, and followed it earthward with its hitherto extended wings clasped closely to its sides. So swiftly did it follow the falling body of the snake that the poisonous creature had scarcely slapped the ground with its bruised body extended, ere it was snapped up again in the long, bony beak that resembled the blades of a housewife's scissors, and again the captor went aloft with its victim, to repeat its former manœuvre, and all the time this was going on, the other three kingfishers were circling round the successful hunter, uttering shrill shrieks of laughter that sounded like a girls' school gone crazy, and these sounds floating downward from the region of a blue burnished sky, sounded weird and unearthly even in the ears of the experienced watcher who stood taking mental notes of this tragedy of the wilds—a killer being killed.

" Iphm," grumbled Mac, " A wish a' reptiles could be dealt wi' in the same fashion. A ken mair than yin A'd wipe oot ma ainsel' wi' just as much mercy as yon kingfisher gied tae the serpent, eef it were no f'r the laws that men are fules enough tae mak' tae guard wha's unclean frae righteous justice. The laws—" he grumbled reminiscently—" it's ma ain judgment that laws are mair often a cloak f'r scoundrels than a shield f'r honest men. Dom the laws. Maist o' those that hae been made since Moses gied us those he could coont on his ten fingers, are as worthless as the wind spewed frae the belly o' a porpoise." He stood for a minute or two, watching the black and white kingfishers shredding the still quivering body of the serpent into long streaks, and burying it inside themselves ; then, with a parting nod in the direction of the feathered hunters, he rumbled : " Umph—the top o' the mornin' tae ye, ma frien's ; ye've justified y'r existence, anyway ; ye've cleansed the earth o' yin pest."

Strolling down to the lovely little lake, closely followed by Miracle and his men, he admired its beauties, for the water was like molten silver and the basin that held it, being of pure white quartz, glinted in the sunlight and threw out sparks and specks of colour that would have made a jeweller's window look tame by comparison. The big man was in one of his gentle moods, his nature-loving moods, and a cry of almost boyish delight broke from him as, looking up from the water, he espied dangling from amazingly slender branches a number of pear-shaped nests which he knew to be the home of the weaver-bird."

" Weel, weel, weel," he exclaimed, " yon's a sicht tae gladden the heart o' any man who loves the wilderness an' the wealth o' mysteries it contains."

Even as he spoke, a loud " Hallo " from the hills behind him drew his attention from his studies in natural history, and, turning, he saw Bucky O'Grady advancing upon him, followed by half a dozen giggling and grinning bush girls dressed (?) in the white clay crinolines of Bucky's manufacture.

" Wha' did ye bring those she-zebras wi' ye for ? " demanded McGlusky, with a tang of unmistakable displeasure in his voice.

" Och, bring 'em ? Ut's themselves that did the bringin'. The she-cats are that pleased wid their new outfit, they've been plaguin' me to paint buttons on thim, the same as yez an' me's got on our clothes, Mac, so Oi thried to give them the slip an' Oi came afther yez, hot-foot, but divil a bit could Oi shake thim off. Phwat are yez lookin' for in the trees, Mac ? "

McGlusky extended his hand and motioned towards the pear-shaped nests.

" Birrds' nests," exclaimed the Irishman, with a strange note of glee in his voice. " Bejabers, don't Oi wish Oi was a bhoy again."

" We're a' wishin' that, Bucky, when we're men, an' when we're boys we're wishin' we were men, an' had whuskers. We're strange beasties, we humans, never content wi' the present, an' always reachin' oot after the unattainable. We're never satisfied. When we're free we wish we were marrit, an' when we're marrit we wish we were dead."

" Phwat kind av birrds live in thim nests, Mac ? Divil take me, Oi think ye know every birrd that flies ; phwatever they are," he continued, " they've not much sense, or they'd build their nests in the crutch av the branches an' not tag 'em on to twigs that let them swing about like rockin' cradles in every breeze that blows."

"No' much sense, eh?" gurgled McGlusky, his eyes twinkling. "Stand richt whaur ye are, an' cover yersel' wi' the cloak o' humility, while A read ye a lesson in cold common sense frae the book o' nature. Yon nests are built by the weaver birds. Rin y'r eyes ower them an' see hoo they're protectit on the ootside frae rain an' dew an' moisture o' any kind. We'll pull yin o' them doon in a meenit, an' ye'll see they're builded woven thegither wi' such cunnin' skill that eef ye put enough o' them unner ye as stuffin' in a chair, ye'd think ye were sittin' on a seat upholstered wi' the finest steel springs that ever were made. A've been in pairt o' the auld East, Bucky, ma son, whaur tae this day they collect the nests o' the weaver birds an' use them f'r that purpose, an' as the black men o' this generation dae, so did their faithers' faithers, richt awa' back tae the time when the men wore tails. Perhaps," he continued, "they got the idea o' havin' saft seats when they were sore on the spot whaur their tails dropped off. A'm no' knowin' eef that pairt aboot the tails is heestory or fable, Bucky, though when A look at ye, A dinna ken why it shouldna be true, but A'll swear tae the truth o' the use the men o' the auld East mak' o' the woven nests o' the weaver birds, though they dinna ca' the birds by that name in the lands A speak o'."

"If ut is thrue, Mac, where does their sense come in hangin' the nests that must have took so much skilful labour on to twigs, an' every blessed nest hanging roight over the wather? If they dhrop they'll drown their young. They may have sense in the buildin' but not much to spake av in the placin' av their castles."

"Ye loose-lipped Irishman, haud y'r blether, an' tak' anither lesson frae the birds o' the air. Ken ye this? Wherever the things flourish in plenty that the weaver birds live on, there as sure as ye'll find sin among saints as well as among shoemakers, ye'll find grass snakes in plenty, an' eef there's yin thing mair than anither that a grass snake loves it's the eggs an' young fledglings o' the weaver birds. Eef the weaver birds placed their nests i' the crutch o' the strong boughs, they'd no' rear many young yins, an' the God o' nature who made them, gied the pretty wee feathered things the sense to ootwit the guile o' the serpent, an' it's a dom peety He didna' gie ye as much. Kennin' these things, when the weaver birds mate, they string their nests frae a twig sae slender that the smallest snake darena' risk its weight upon it. Noo, wee mannie, eef ye've as much sense as a white rabbit, ye'll start frae this day on tae study the things o' nature an' learn wisdom therefrom, f'r in many things the birds an' the beasties ken mair than kings. A wise mon who keeps his eyes open can learn something even frae a worm, f'r a worm can mak' a hole i' the earth wi' its head an' git intae it oot o' the way o' danger, an' A'm dommed eef a mon can."

As the pair turned away from the pool after Mac's forceful lecture concerning nature's laws and mysteries, O'Grady's restless eyes were attracted by the honeycombed mountain face that stood in all its lonely grandeur. Pointing to the network of caves, he cried:

"Shure, Mac, that's the sort av place Oi used to drame about when Oi was a gossoon. Ut looks loike a million smugglers' caves, an' ut ought to be filled wid hidden treasure. Oi'd loike to see phwat's inside the face av ut."

Anything in the way of exploration always appealed to the big fellow, and he promptly fell in with his mate's mood, but when he announced his intention to Miracle, the little bushman most emphatically vetoed the suggestion, and by word and gesture made it plain that nothing under heaven would tempt him or his men to go near the honeycombed mountain, and when

Mac insisted that he and the Irishman were going to explore the network of caves, with or without an escort, Miracle became quite distressed in his anxiety.

" There's danger o' some sort in yon caves," rumbled Mac in his austere fashion, " but wha' it is, A'm dommed eef A can mak' oot. It canna be just leopards or cheetahs or panthers or any ither beasties o' that description tha's puttin' the wind up Miracle an' his crood. They're game enough at any time tae tak' a chance wi' dangers o' that sort."

O'Grady made a rather contemptuous gesture.

" Shure, ut's wan av their superstitions. They'll be afther belavin' that the mountain's a roostin' place for a lot av evil spirits. If the mud-heads have got howld av any belief loike that, McGlusky, ye couldn't pound ut out av thim wid a club."

" P'raps they're richt, yon mountain may be a roostin' place f'r speerits. Ye ken speerits hae tae roost somewhere, but A'm goin' tae see."

" Are yez ? " retorted the Irishman. " Well, if Oi thought there was spirits in that mountain, ye couldn't chase me up to ut wid a shot gun."

Then McGlusky scoffed at his mate, jibing at him.

" Faith, wee mannie, ye've got a deil o' a lot o' room tae blether aboot the ignorance o' the savages. Ye're as superstitious as they are."

Whilst they talked, they were walking, climbing by easy grades to the face of the mysterious mount. Almost every inch of the way they trod was flower strewn. They walked on a veritable carpet of bloom, and the incessant hum of myriads of bees droned in their ears. So heavy and insistent was this droning sound that it brought on a feeling of drowsiness.

" By the weddin' vows o' ma sainted mither," murmured McGlusky, " A feel like a wee child lost in wonderland. A could lay me doon here an' sleep. It must be the garden o' the gods."

Bucky yawned lazily.

"Ut's a grand ladies' bower widout the ladies. Phwat do yez say to campin' here for an hour, Mac ?"

The big fellow gave himself an energetic shake.

"Nae, nae, let's get tae the job in hand. Shake a leg, an' we'll soon be wi'in the coolness o' yin o' yon caves."

"Ye are niver content," grumbled Bucky. "Give yez the best in the worrld, an' ye want better," but in spite of his repining, he pushed rapidly on in the wake of his long-legged companion.

When they got close to the face of the mountain, they were amazed to notice that in and out of every cavern's mouth poured an endless stream of bees.

"Begob," chuckled Bucky, "Oi belave we've struck the biggest honey hive in all the wide, wide worrld. There's bees here by the tens av millions, an' all av thim workin' as if they were under conthract to fill the belly av this great mountain wid wild honey."

Then a thought flashed through the Irish mind, and he slapped his thigh and laughed consumedly.

"Wha's bitin' ye ?" demanded Mac.

"Faith, Oi was only laughin' to think how near Miracle and his bunch came to foolin' us, Mac."

"In wha' way did they try tae fule us ?"

"Shure, didn't they thry to frighten us away from this great store av honey ? The black divils wanted to keep this sacret to themselves, an' small blame to thim, though there's honey enough here to feed an army."

"Weel, weel, human nature is human nature, black or white. But come on, let's see the inside. We'll hae somethin' tae talk aboot as long as we live."

When Mac said that, he was expounding a greater truth than he knew, for he was going to get something to talk about to the day he died.

The pair pushed on through a long narrow vaulted archway, and the soft grey coolness by which they were surrounded was an absolute relief from the glorious glowing sunlight of the outside world. After proceeding a few yards, the archway opened on to an enormous cavern, which led apparently to the very top of the mountain, for the whole vast structure of stone was hollow and dimly lit by the enormous number of caves that opened on the mountain's face like unglazed windows. In the mammoth cavern vast flocks of honey bees were coming and going, each to its own particular hive or to the outer world by means of its own peculiar cavernous entrance and exit. As far as the eyes of the two adventurers could reach, both upward and around, beautifully constructed waxen honeycombs could be seen clinging to the rocky surfaces. It was a perfect vision of beauty and utility combined.

" Begosh," chortled O'Grady, " Oi'm thinkin' this is a greather find than y'r platinum mine. Here's a million barrels av honey all ready waitin' to our hands. We've only got to get ut out an' we'll be richer than princes, an' when we've emptied this storehouse, the little ladies an' gintlemen wid wings will soon set to worrk an' fill ut again f'r us, an' we can go on f'r ever an' ever Amen, gettin' richer an' richer, an' divil a bit av harrm will we be doin' to anybody. Ye can kape y'r ould platinum mine, Mac ; give me *this*."

As he spoke, O'Grady in his intense excitement struck a great piled-up mass of snow-white honeycomb attached to a rock near by, struck it with the flat of the butt of his rifle, and whooped with joy like a man gone mad. The next instant McGlusky, who was standing nearest to the outraged hive, was whooping also, but not with joy, for out of the mouth of the broken hive poured an avalanche of winged furies, and it seemed to Mac that every one of them settled upon him and settled instantly. In the cavern up to the moment the whirr of myriad wings and the ceaseless droning of an avalanche of busy toilers had produced a sound that might have been mistaken for a lullaby of the gods, so sweetly peaceful and pregnant with happiness was it. All this was changed the moment O'Grady's rash act loosened the torrent of angry honey hunters in the waxen castle. The droning changed to something akin to a storm. The whole atmosphere of the gigantic cave became surcharged with the electricity of anger; the peaceful workers ceased their toil, and charged down in battalions in the direction of the trouble and the trouble makers. In an instant McGlusky realised the peril of the moment.

"Rin, ye blastie, rin—" he yelled, and set the example by speeding down the passage way through which he had entered, like a bull bison with a wolf pack at its heels, and O'Grady fled with him. As a walker the Irishman could not be compared with his companion, but O'Grady could run, and if ever he ran he did so that day. If they had been naked men, the pair of them would have been stung to death before they had travelled far, so enormous was the volume of the angry insects that swarmed upon them. As it was, they got enough to go on with, for their bare necks and faces, bare hands and arms, were black with the fiercely attacking swarms.

On their way upward, the two men had noted a gulley into which water from the mountain side flowed freely, and for this McGlusky headed like a thirst-famished steer, and the little Irishman followed. The yells they were uttering as they ran warned Miracle and his people of what had happened up above, but this time the game little black hunters did not approach to the rescue as they had done when the white men were in peril from the bands of missing links. Miracle and his folks knew they could fight the links, and possibly overcome them, but experience had taught them that no man or body of men could do battle with the countless millions of wild bees, if once their wrath was stirred, for, with that strange sense of organisation which belongs to the bee tribe more than to anything else in the whole world of created things, the whole of the bees, colony upon colony, would join in to repel any attack upon their fortress and its stores. A solitary hive in any other mountain cleft or in any hollow tree in the jungle, the natives would attack and despoil of its honey readily enough, but the vast honeycombed mountain they wisely left to the busy hordes who probably from the beginning of the world had held it. So Miracle and his people stood afar off, waiting, watching and wondering if the white men who were so resourceful in so many ways would be able to escape from the trouble they had brought down upon themselves.

Long before McGlusky reached the edge of the water that was to prove his and his mate's salvation, he was in a frenzy of agony. His eyes were closing, his nostrils bursting, his ears swelling until they looked like scarlet tomatoes ripening in the sun, and his vastly swollen lips were acurl with anguish. Many a time and oft he had suffered for his own sinning or the sins of others, but never had he received such swift drastic and unendurable torment as he received on this occasion, for as fast as one horde that had fastened upon him had driven in their stings and left in their acid poison and then dropped off, another horde took their places, and as it was with McGlusky, so it was with O'Grady. He did not get so much as Mac received, because there was not as much of him for the belligerents to fasten upon, but by the ungodly language he used and the yells he uttered, he got enough. At the first splash of water, the pair plunged underneath the surface, and thus freed themselves from more active torment, but they had to keep diving and remaining under water, only coming to the surface long enough to draw a few gasping breaths, and dive again, for the bees hovered over them in clouds filling the air with an angry whirring sound, which was almost like the beat of war drums, so enormous was the volume of their numbers. It was only when the sun was sinking that the attacking legions drew off and returned to their mammoth fortress. Even when they disappeared, neither Mac nor the Irishman were aware of the fact, for to them for the time being there was no difference between night and day, for they were as blind as day-old kittens, and pretty nearly as helpless.

Knowing the habits of the wild bees as they knew the habits of everything that walked or crawled or flew in the wilds, Miracle and his men did not scruple to advance up the heights as the shades of evening fell, and it was they who rescued the two tormented trail-blazers and led them afar from the scene of their inglorious defeat, and then the women of the tribe worked upon the two white men with the juices of herbs whose virtues they knew.

It was many days before either eyesight or the powers of proper speech came back to either of them. For the first twenty-four hours they were in a state of coma, poisoned by the virulent acid that had been injected into them so copiously. When McGlusky could speak, the things he said to O'Grady are not going into this chronicle; they were unprintable, though fluent and picturesque. In conclusion he remarked, shaking a clenched fist in the still swollen and disorganised face of his friend :

"Mon O'Grady, eef ever ye say honey tae me again, A'll beat ye until ye're yin big bruise, an' eef A can find the spot, A'll rub ye in the ashes o' hell. Ye wee meddlin' blastie, for why did ye punch a hole intae a honey hive an' let loose a hunner' million shapes o' torment on us ? Look at me noo, O'Grady. Ye've nae only gied me the torments o' Tophet, but ye've brocht ma manhood tae shame, tae say naethin' o' y'r ain shamelessness. The wummen o' the tribe hae stripped us like two babes i' the wood, an' rubbed us frae head tae foot wi' healin' herbs, an' noo A've naethin' tae hide ma blushes but ma whuskers. Yon'er sittin' on the bole o' a fallen tree is the Black Lily an' she's wearin' ma breeks aroon' her neck. Wha's become o' y'r ain A'm no' knowin', an' wha's mair, A'm no' carin'. Eef ye grew a tail an' swung frae a bough, as A've nae doot y'r great-great-gran' aunt did, it wad ainly be the fate ye deserve, ye pryin', pokin', meddlin' son o' a witless wumman."

" Phwat are ye squealin' about, Mac ? If ye want y'r breeches, phwy don't yez go an' get thim from the woman ? "

" Gang an' get them ! " bawled Mac. " An' me wi' less on ma carcass than wad cover a strawberry."

Suddenly inspiration came to O'Grady.

" Mac, do ye remember the foine big skin av the bay cat ye killt in the mimosa scrub ? "

" A dae, an' wha' o' it ? "

" Shure, honey, ut's a grand bit av fur, an' would make a foine kilt f'r a big upstandin' man loike yerself."

" Iphm, ye've got glimmerin's o' sense at times, wee mannie. The bay cat's hide is here in ma pack. It willna cover the whole o' ma carcass, but it will gie me a wee bittie o' self-respect."

Diving his arm into his pack, the trail blazer soon unearthed the magnificent fur, and with the aid of his knife and O'Grady, he soon converted it into an abbreviated kilt. Wrapping the fur round his loins, he laced it down one side with raw hide thongs, then he upreared himself and faced the Irishman with some slight anxiety still showing in his eyes.

"A'm respectable, eef A'm no' fashionable," he growled. "Tell me, ye wee maker o' trouble, how dae A look?"

O'Grady, who was on his knees in the grass, and apparently not upset by his own nudeness, exclaimed:

"Turn round an' round loike a teetotum, McGlusky, whilst Oi size up y'r kilt."

Slowly Mac revolved on his toes, then waited for the Irishman's verdict.

"Weel," he demanded, "wha' dae A look like?"

O'Grady stroked his chin reflectively, and did his best to look as serious as the situation demanded, for he knew that in some things McGlusky's temper was as touchy as blasting powder, and just as likely to go off if fired.

"Ye may belave me or belave me not, McGlusky, but the new rig-out suits yez foine. Ye look more loike a mad dervish than ever."

"Wha's that?"

Mac bent frowning brows on the face of the kneeling figure.

"Oi only said the fur kilt suits yez foine. If ut was six inches longer behind, an' had a fringe av beads on ut, ut'd be perfect, but ut'll do, Mac, an' ut's the grand barbarian ye look in ut."

"A've a feelin'," grumbled McGlusky, "it's twelve guid inches too short tae match wi' a mon's deegnity. Dom the bay cat, why did it no' grow some more before A shot it? Ye ken, O'Grady, it doesna' matter much hoo a man dresses in ceevilised communities, but oot i' the wilds it's the mon who wears claes who is always the leader an' the law-giver an' the boss o' the business. Tha's why naked savages kow tow to them. It's no' sae much the mentality as the claes tha' does it.

Come on. Let's go for a 'pasear,' an' let's see phwat Miracle an' his people think av yez."

"Not until ye are dressed wi' some sense o' decency, wee mannie," remarked Mac severely. "It's oor duty to uplift these savages, it's no' f'r us tae live doon tae their level."

Rummaging in his pack, he came across another skin that would suit his purpose, the beautifully spotted hide of a cheetah, and working dexterously he soon had his small mate clothed (?) as decently as he himself was, then, but not till then, McGlusky was willing to go forth into the open.

Their appearance was greeted with such a furore of delight by both men and women, that Mac forgot his ill-humour and fairly beamed his delight. Members of both sexes crowded round the white giant, and the liberties some of the dusky ladies took with his kilt in their anxiety to examine it was about the only fly in the ointment of his delight. The wild tribesfolk recognised both the bay cat and cheetah furs at a glance, and by words and gestures made it evident that they, too, would like to be clothed in similar fashion.

"It's the han' o' Providence," exclaimed McGlusky, wheeling on his little friend. "As A tellt ye before, claes are the hall-mark o' ceevilisation, an' A had me doots eef we'd ever be able tae mak' sic a primitive people as these bushmen wear claes, even eef we brought them here by the waggon-load, for they're sair distrustfu' o' maist things that white man or wumman use or wear, but noo they've seen the skins we've converted intae claes they ken they can get a' they need f'r the huntin', an' they're goin' tae dae it. A heard Miracle tellin' his huntin' men tae be ready i' the morn tae start searchin' the caves i' the moontains f'r the big striped an' spotted cats. In a week frae to-day we'll hae this whole pairty rigged oot in decency. We've blazed a new trail, the day, Bucky, f'r when yince we've got them dressed, we'll hae started them on the onward march o' progress."

"Bedad, ut was a grand bit av luck we thought av these skins," chuckled O'Grady. "Ut's made y'r work at civilisin' these blackies aisy."

"Luck," snorted Mac. "Wha' ye ca' luck was the han' o' Providence guidin' us tae dae the work that had tae be done."

"Was ut, bedad ? If ut was the hand av Providence that led us into that big beehive an' gave us phwat we got, Oi'd swop my share av Providence f'r a second-hand suit av pyjamas."

"Tha's because ye're no' a thinker, just a babbler," retorted the Scotch Australian with all his old sententiousness. "Eef ye look intae events after they've happened, an' study their causes an' effects, ye'll find there's a guidin' principle in everything."

"Will Oi ? " almost shouted O'Grady. "Ye can flay me an' use me hide f'r a tobacco pouch if iver Oi let a 'guidin' principle' lead me into another busy beehive as big as the wan we sampled. Busy bees ! " he grated through his teeth. "They get too damn busy f'r my loikin' when ye happen to thread on the tail av their laws an' covenants."

Half an hour later, as O'Grady was strolling aimlessly about near their camp, he saw something fluttering on a thorn bush, and going to inspect the phenomenon, he discovered McGlusky's leather riding pants, and a little further he came across his own outfit. Running back to his mate with his trophies in his arms, he exclaimed :

"By the mother av Mike, McGlusky, you've made big medicine this time."

"Meanin' what ? " was the crisp rejoinder.

"Phwat would Oi be manin' but the clothin' epidemic which ye have started among the blackies ? Here's y'r breeches which the Black Lily has thrown away, an' here's me own duds. Oi'm not crazy wid delight at foindin' me own things, Mac, f'r the kilt ye have made me is nice an' airy, but take y'r breeches an' wear 'em under the kilt, an' ye'll be feelin' y'r own man again."

Five minutes later, when Mac was dressed in his old habiliments, O'Grady remarked slyly :

"Faith, pardner, wan good turn deserves another. The Black Lily gave yez back y'r breeks, phwy not play the part av the grand gintleman an' give her y'r fur kilt ? She's just over there beyant, hidin' behint those two silver-coloured rocks. May be she's hopin' ye will throw away the fur. Oi'm thinkin' that's phwat she's been lookin' for for the last half hour."

"Watchin' ? " growled Mac. "Ye dinna mean tae say she was watchin' me dress an' undress ? "

"Faith an' she was, then, an' she niver turned a hair av her."

"A'weel, she's a chiel o' nature, an' perhaps she's too innocent tae tell whaur wrong begins an' richt finishes."

"P-e-r-h-a-p-s— ! " was Bucky's laconic comment.

McGlusky was turning the beautiful fur over and over in his hands.

"A've spent many years i' the wilds, an' A've never seen yin sae beautiful," he murmured. "A may spend many years mair, an' never see anither yin like it. It will fetch its weight in siller eef A get it doon tae civilised pairts." He brushed the beautiful trophy against his own rough cheeks, and revelled in the silky touch of it. "Ye're braw an' ye're bonny," he murmured, "an' A could set ma ain price on ye."

O'Grady's eyes were dancing, for he knew this side of McGlusky's nature.

"Shure ut's beautiful, Mac, but think av the dacency ut would bring to the Black Lily."

"Decency's a' richt," growled Mac, as he thrust the trophy back into the inner depths of his pack.

"Decency's a' richt, Bucky, but hoo dae A ken she unnerstan's the meanin' o' it? Anyway, yin mair day o' primitiveness willna hurt her, an' the morn's morn A'll gang oot an' kill a cheetah an' gie her the skin. These moontain glades are fu' o' those beasties, an' she'll no ken the difference onyway."

CHAPTER IX

"THE WAYS O' A WUMMAN"

WHEN McGlusky awoke next morning, the first thing his eyes fell upon was his own splendid horse tethered to a tree near by. It was the same animal that, in the name of justice and retribution, he had so long ago looted from Von Videlheim's camp on the trail to the diamond fields. The animal had suffered sorely whilst crossing the desert, during the period when Mac and his mate had nearly perished, but good grass and plentiful water, of which there was abundance near the bushmen's village, had restored the animal to all its former powers, and it looked sleek and glossy as it stood with arched neck and pawing hoofs where one of Miracle's men had tethered it. The sight of his equine friend sent a glow of pleasure through the trail-blazer's heart, for he had not expected to see this comrade of his until he returned to the foot-hills.

"A wunner," he muttered, "why they brocht the beastie here ?" Then suddenly he remembered that a few days earlier he had casually expressed the wish that his horse was near at hand, adding to O'Grady : "The long glades and valleys between these mountains are overrun wi' wild boar in the early mornin's, an' A'd like naething better than tae hae a gallop after them an' dae a bit o' pig-stickin', f'r it's gran' fun, wi' just a taste o' risk in it tha' mak's fun worth haein'."

Miracle had been standing by, and had apparently taken no notice of the speech, but all unknown to

McGlusky, he had sent away one of his runners, and here was the horse ready to the trail-blazer's hand.

O'Grady, waking up, soon saw this new addition to the mountain outfit, and when he discovered that his own horse had not also been brought, he was not a little bit peeved.

" Ut bates me, Mac," he snapped, " the way ye get everything yez set y'r heart on. How do ye do ut ? That black divil could just as aisily have brought mine, but he didn't. How do yez put the Indian sign on them all, tell me that now ? "

" A'm no' knowin' exactly, but p'raps it's because A tak' an interest in them."

" Faith, so do Oi."

" A've no suspeecioned it tae any noticeable extent, Bucky. Ye've no' troubled tae learn any o' their language, an' ye canna fin' oot wha' interests them. Dae ye think they're no prood o' their knowledge o' birds an' beasts an' flowers an' trees an' herbs, an' a' the things o' nature ? A white mon wad be prood o' such knowledge, an' a black man's a white mon eef ye skin him."

This explanation did not allay O'Grady's irritation to any great extent, for the Irishman was passionately fond of horse-riding, and would have enjoyed few things on earth more than a rousing gallop after the wild boars.

" Och, cut out the preachin', Mac. Ye're the aisiest man on God's earth t'r plaze when ye get all ye ask for. Ye'll go huntin' in the saddle, whilst Oi'll have to go on foot, if Oi go at all. Oi've no luck at all, at all, an' that's the truth av ut ! "

" Tha', sonny, will gie ye a' the mair time tae become a philosopher. Put y'r sorrows oot wi' last week's washin' ; the longer ye cuddle them, the closer they'll cling."

For a moment O'Grady glared at the big fellow, then turned away with a taunting laugh, exclaiming:

"Shure, Mac, sometoimes ye are so mane, ye'd begrudge a dead heerin' the brine ut's pickled in."

Still chuckling over the little man's distemper, McGlusky started to make for himself a hunting spear. This he soon accomplished by means of binding a native assegai to a long, straight, slender bough he cut from a nearby tree. It was not as perfect as a hunting spear that might be purchased in the bazaars of the old East, but in the hands of a strong man it would serve its purpose. Quite gaily the big fellow cantered out of camp, and rode leisurely over the undulating land that lay between him and the valley he had selected for his purpose. The morning was glorious; the sun had not yet risen from its slumbers, and there was a tang in the mountain air that made his blood thrill and his pulses leap. As he rode he hummed most unmusically the refrain of a hunting song. Topping a beautifully grassed bit of upland, he looked down a glorious slope of grassland, and right before his eyes a dozen sows with a number of suckers by their side were rooting with their snouts for a morning meal, whilst a few paces in front of them a well-grown boar in its prime stood upon a little knoll. The whole porcine entourage made as fine a picture of wild life as any hunter might wish to view. For a second or two McGlusky viewed the scene with sparkling eyes, then muttered:

"Yon tusker will gie me a guid rin f'r ma money, or A'm mistaken i' the looks o' him, but A'll gie him fair warnin' an' a fechtin' chance f'r his life. Fair play is bonnie play f'r mon or hog."

Jamming his old hat hard down on to his ears, Mac stood in his stirrups and made the woodlands ring with a wild "Halloo!"

The instant his stentorian voice awoke the echoes, the wild pigs and their brood sprang into action, the splendid boar at their head. Downward they plunged, racing for some covert known to them. Having given fair law to the game, Mac gave the quarry no further latitude, for he knew how fast a wild boar in condition can travel. One touch from his spurs in the brown flanks, one forward movement of his great body, and man and horse were off in full pursuit. It was fast work, splendid work ; the good horse, eager for a gallop after its long spell, gripped at the bit and reefed at the reins, and went away joying in its speed and power. Little need had Mac to guide the horse he rode, for the animal had sighted the quarry, and instinct told it what was the task in hand. The sows and piglings scattered and broke in all directions as the thunder of onrushing hoofs grew nearer, and ever nearer, but the stout-hearted boar held onward on his course. All along his prominent spine the bristles stood erect, a sure sign that if cornered he would fight. That the animal's temper was roused to the boiling pitch, the hard riding hunter in the animal's wake could plainly see, for as the monarch of the herd fled, he was gnashing his teeth in royal wrath, and the blobs of foam that flew behind him as he rushed flaked his blackish-grey flanks like cream blown outward from a churn. Suddenly the ground dipped sharply, and for a moment the boar passed from the rider's ken, and as Mac topped the rise over which the boar had disappeared, he saw some fifty yards in front of him a cactus hedge than ran squarely across the path of the tusker. By some freak of nature the cactus hedge lay so straight and was so thick in its growth, that it looked as if it had been sown by the hand of man to act as a barricade. Well McGlusky knew that every thick prickly leaf was covered by bayonet-like spikes an inch and a half in length. It made a deadly barrier in the path of any animal, excepting an elephant running amok, or a wild boar in extremis. A tiger, a cheetah, a leopard or a lion would not have faced a cactus hedge so high or so dense, but nothing will stop the headlong rush of a wild boar roused to wrath, and McGlusky knew it. The gallant beast, with head down, charged straight at the terrible barrier, risking the loss of its eyes and the cruel laceration of its tough hide from the dreaded thorn spikes. No half-hearted rush would have carried it a foot into those interlacing, interwoven stems and branches, but the boar made no half-hearted effort, and by some miracle it burst through, though it left a bloody trail behind it. That glorious charge woke McGlusky's admiration, and he loosed a yell that must have sounded in the ears of the four-footed fugitive like a blast blown from Hades. Gripping his spear so that he carried it horizontally, Mac tightened his grasp on his reins with his bridle hand, and, craning far over his horse's withers, he clipped the spurs home and sent the great horse he bestrode straight at the tremendous barrier that barred his progress. So high and so wide was the cactus hedge that even with an ordinary weighted man in the saddle, the leap would have been one that few horses could have negotiated, fewer men dared, but such a moment and such a peril were just what McGlusky's semi-savage soul delighted in. The power of him, the magnetism of the man, the grim recklessness woke all that was big and brave in the gallant heart of the good horse. With a lesser man in the saddle, the animal might have faltered and shied away from such a task. For a moment the brown beauty pricked its ears, as if measuring the leap it had sighted, then laid them flat on its shapely head, and with a short, swift, fierce snort, rushed onward like an avalanche to its great endeavour, and at the right moment McGlusky's spurs struck home again, and the big brown animal under him responded to the call of the will power of the man in the saddle. Upward and outward the beauty leapt, McGlusky balancing himself with superb skill both for the upward and downward flight of the horse. Shifting his weight to keep the horse's balance level, holding the reins just tight enough to give the straining steed confidence in man mastery, but not so tight as to impede the horse in its splendid effort, and man and horse, working together with machine-like skill, victory had to come to them, and victory came, as it comes nine times out of ten, to those whose shibboleth is "Pluck, not luck."

Mac felt the spring of the greensward under his horse's hoofs, as the good beast landed and strode on, and then he threw up his head and laughed the full, deep-chested laugh of the red-blooded men who in the pride of the might of their manhood count themselves little less than the gods. Up a slight incline the tusker was toiling, a wee bit heavily now, and the red blotches on the grass showed that the cactus thorns had taken their toll from the head and shoulder, flank and rump of the untamed and untameable lord of the jungle. Again Mac raised a wild "Halloo-o-o," and as he neared the crest of the hill, he couched his lance, for he knew that a tusker of that kind would die fighting, knew too, that it behoved him to be ready for the swift and sudden movement when the boar should turn and charge. It was well for him he did know, for scarcely had he set his lance in rest, ere the hunted beast whirled right round in its own tracks and charged. The transformation all occurred in the twinkling of an eye, and McGlusky knew that if he missed his spear-stroke, the big tusks of the boar, striking at his horse's forelegs, would bring the animal he loved crashing to grass, possibly never to rise again. He picked his spot, gluing his eyes on the fatal place where the neck and body join. He could see the bony shoulders rising higher than the spine, and straight between them he pointed the burnished tip of his spear.

It was all over in the intake of a breath ; the horse speeding one way, the boar rushing to meet it, making the impact irresistible. Straight down through neck joint, and lungs, the spear was driven, and without a sound the brave boar lay dying as he had lived, a monarch to the last. So fierce was the impact that the assegai which Mac had lashed to his lance-shaft snapped like a withered reed, and Mac thundered by the struggling carcass, sitting like a rock in the saddle, holding the now useless lance shaft in his strong right hand. Realising the position, he tossed the shaft away, and, gripping his reins with both hands, flung the big beast he rode back upon its haunches. Dismounting, he left the animal to graze, only trailing his reins as a safeguard, for he had broken the beast to recognise a trailing rein as a sign that it must not wander. Then he strode back, drawing his knife from its sheath as he did so, determined to take the tusks from the slain animal as a trophy of the morning's chase. As he stooped over the fallen quarry, he saw that there was still a flicker of life left in it, for its little fierce eyes glared at him vengefully. Well as he knew the amazing vitality of all the boar tribe, it surprised McGlusky to see that life still remained in the mass of bone and muscle that had fallen to his spear. Had it been otherwise, he would have approached the creature more carefully, for he knew by past experience that a wounded wild boar will fight till the last gasp that's in it. Before he could stoop to give it the *coup de grâce*, the creature raised itself on its forelegs, and swinging its huge head, it struck viciously at the human leg that was nearest it, and one of its tusks ripped McGlusky's flesh midway between the heel and calf, inflicting a painful but not dangerous wound. Mac leapt back, a snarling exclamation grating through his lips, his long hunting knife clenched in his right hand, but he had no need to use it. That effort was the last spasm of life and energy left in the tusker. It rolled over on its flank and lay there, stone dead.

" Ye game deil," muttered Mac. " Ye died as A hope A may die masel', strikin' hard an' dyin' grimly."

Having made sure that his quarry was in reality past all mending, he drew off his shirt, and cutting away one of the sleeves, made a bandage for his wounded leg, and then fulfilled the purpose that had taken him to the fallen boar, by removing the semicircular tusks that are formed of a species of ivory.

This task took him some little time, and when it was over, he looked in the direction in which he had left his horse, only to find that the animal had deserted him. As quickly as his lame leg would permit, Mac walked to the spot where he had left the horse feeding, and, picking up its tracks, followed them a few yards, studying them carefully, and he noticed that the horse had not walked away, as such animals will when merely feeding ; it had gone off at a trot, as its hoofmarks plainly portrayed, and McGlusky, wise in bush law, knew that something must have startled the beast.

" A'weel," he growled, " its nae use complainin' ; the beastie has gone, an' A'm hopin' it will reach camp in safety. Maybe the smell o' the boar's blood attractit yin o' the great cats, f'r these regions are fu' o' the deils. Sma' blame tae the horse f'r boltin' eef it caught sight o' a panther."

For a moment or two he stood ruminating, then, as his way was when alone, he again voiced his thoughts aloud.

"A've got tae tramp back tae camp, an' that will dae the wound on ma leg nae guid. No' that it matters much, it's ainly a four-inch gash that rippit ma flesh tae the bone, but A'm wishin' the A'michty when He made horses had gied them the same sense o' fidelity that He puts intae the hearts o' dogs. It doesna' matter hoo much ye love a horse or hoo much a horse loves ye, it will always think o' its ainsel' first i' time o' danger, an' hoof it awa' tae safety, but a dog eef it loves ye will gie ye a warnin' bark or growl, an' then come tae y'r side tae fecht wi' ye or for ye, an' by the Lord that made me, a dog is the ainly animal in a' the kingdom o' four-footed things that will cling tae a mon. Weel, weel, A'll just hae tae tak' ma bearin's an' mak' back tae oor biviouac."

Suiting his actions to his words, he was soon wending his way towards the camp. By and by, as he climbed the uplands his wounded leg began to pain him considerably, and looking at the bandage, he found that the blood had soaked through, and that every now and again a drop stained the grass.

"A'm thinkin'," he growled, "A'd better mak' a short cut hamewards by yin o' the jungle paths. Yon dead boar must hae cut yin o' the sma' veins in ma leg, an' it'll need tendin' tae, eef A'm no' tae go lame f'r a month."

Having refixed the bandage as near as possible to his satisfaction, he put his new intention into effect by striking into a jungle track which, judging by its general appearance, had been made by the wild creatures that tenanted the wilderness of trees and shrubs and creeping vines. Most men following such a trail as that in a country frequented by so many kinds of dangerous prowling animals, would have felt something akin to a tremor of fear, but McGlusky's faith in himself and his star was boundless. Once, it is true, he grunted:

"A behaved like a fule at the height o' his folly when A left camp wi' nae other weapon than a boar spear an' ma huntin' knife. It wadna hae been much trouble f'r me tae hae buckled on ma belt wi' ma twa revolvers, an' noo A've naethin' but ma knife."

Three or four times during the next hour or so he stopped to readjust the bloodstained bandage on his leg, and it was borne in upon him that blood still dripped at intervals from the wound. Suddenly he came to an open space, which seemed familiar to him, for after pausing and looking round, he murmured :

"A'm no sae far awa' frae hame noo, an' A'm hopin' Bucky O'Grady will be in camp. He'll hae tae stitch up this bit scratch i' ma leg, an' then A'll tak' the burn an' sting oot o' it wi' some ointment A'll hae tae mak' oot o' marshmallow boiled doon an' mixed wi' honey an' tallow."

Limping ever so slightly, he crossed the open space, and picked up the thread of the jungle trail on the other side. Feeling that he had not much further to go, his spirits rose, and he began to hum, or, as he would have termed it, he was "makin' a joyfu' noise before the Lord," though where the joyfulness of it came in, it would have puzzled a priest to define.

All unknown to the big adventurer something was happening in the rear of him that would have taken all desire to sing out of his mind, had he but known of it. Just before he had entered the clearing, a beautifully marked creature of the cat kind had been crossing the trail which McGlusky had been treading, and, scenting the occasional spots of blood that had oozed from his wound, the gloriously marked feline changed instantly from a seemingly inoffensive prowler to a blood-lusting demon. The round bullet head, with short pricked ears, pressed close to the trail ; the big golden-green eyes seemed suddenly to blaze as though fed by an inner fire ; the long tail that had been carried in drooping fashion when the creature had been negligently roaming without any special mission in its mind, now became nearly straight, and wagged from side to side. If McGlusky had turned at that moment, he would have recognised both the beast and his own peril, for this animal was a full-grown cheetah. Its hide looked glorious in the fitful sunlight that shone through the tops of the jungle trees, for it was a male in the full of its prime. From its big padded feet, short, enormously thick legs and long, sinuous body, it was covered with jet-black rings about the size of a florin, the glossy rings showing with startling distinctness against the white underground of its hide. The instant it scented blood, four sets of long, cruel claws, that looked like burnished copper, shot out from its velvet-like paws ; the long whiskers on its upper lip began to tremble, as though stirred by an electric current ; its blood-red gums came into view with almost devilish distinctness, and between the gums as healthy a set of snow-white fangs as ever drained blood. The winding nature of the trail hid McGlusky from view, and the cheetah, having scented the dripping stains on the track, glared ahead, listening with all the acuteness of its tribe. Lightly as McGlusky trod, some faint tremor of the earth must have reached the ears of the destroyer, for it instantly began to move forward in the trail-blazer's wake, crouching low, and moving so noiselessly that a shadow could scarce have flitted over the ground more soundlessly. It sighted the man when he was half-way across the clearing, and something in the upright carriage of the human being seemed for a moment or two to daunt the courage of the spotted hunter, for all living things in the wilds seem to possess an instinctive dread of man, the master, but the cheetah had smelt blood, and knew that this thing that walked on two legs was wounded. As it lay crouched to the ground, watching McGlusky move forward, the brute swung its head first to the right, then to the left, as if looking to see if the thing it trailed was alone. Its gaze was almost lightning-like in its intensity, but it failed to see, even as McGlusky had failed to notice, a slender, upright, black figure pressed close against the bole of one of the jungle trees. Reassured by its swift glances to right and left, the cheetah made up its mind to take the hazard of the hunt. With a stealthiness that had to be seen to be appreciated, it went forward on McGlusky's trail, its wonderful network of muscles like finely woven steel springs, working gloriously beneath its glossy hide.

McGlusky's unmelodious voice had just insulted the solemn silence of the jungle with the words:—

"Thou art ma buckler an' ma shield,
A fear na earthly foe,
Nor a' the brood o' Satan's breed
Tha' come frae hell below——"

when the cheetah crouched for its fatal spring. Its glaring yellow-green eyes were fixed on the nape of the trail-blazer's sun-baked neck, its wicked lips curled and quivered, as if to still further bare the gleaming fangs that were so soon to taste blood. It looked as if the gods of chance that had so often protected McGlusky the trail-blazer by flood and field, had forsaken him at last, but in that moment the slender little black figure that had seemed almost to be a part and parcel of the jungle tree a few yards away upon the right, moved its arms swiftly but smoothly. A bow that looked like a toy went up in two small but steady hands, and a poisoned arrow whistling in its flight like an owl's screech, buried itself right in the jugular vein of the crouching cheetah. With a wicked snarl, the savage prowler turned its head and snapped at the poisoned arrow, and the fangs that had been intended for McGlusky's bare neck grew crimson with its own life-blood.

At the sound of the snarl, McGlusky turned, and his eyes fell upon the clawing, raging, demoniacal creature that, in the frenzy of its agony, was gashing the green turf with its terrible claws. Small need to tell the adventurer the peril that had threatened him. He read the whole story at a glance. The broken arrow in the glossy neck proclaimed with dumb eloquence the source of his salvation. Had the cheetah, full grown and powerful as it was, attacked him face to face, and he armed only with his big hunting knife, there would have been a fight that would have become homeric in jungle lore, for Mac was just the sort of person to rise to such a happening. The knife in his mighty right hand, his left gripping fur, he would have fought it out with the devilish thing to the last atom of his energy, but those big fangs and terrible claws would have taken their toll of him, and how such a battle would have ended only the gods could tell. But had the cheetah leaped upon him from behind, as it surely would have done, had it not been for the poisoned arrow, Mac would most surely have gone down face foremost, with those terrible fangs driving deep into the nape of his neck. All those things flashed through his mind as he watched the writhing, foaming, snarling devil of a thing in the jungle glade. All at once the vicious struggling ceased, the swift and deadly poison on the arrow had done its work. The gloriously fashioned carcass stretched itself out, and finis was written to one more tragedy of the wilds. It was then that Mac turned his eyes on his right front, in search of his saviour, for he knew that his salvation had come per the medium of human agency.

"Meeracle, ye wee deil's buckie, come oot o' it," he almost shouted, advancing with long strides and arms outstretched in the direction he knew the arrow must have come from.

In response to his cry and the eloquent invitation of his outstretched arms, a beautifully-fashioned, slender black figure detached itself from the shadows of the undergrowth, a tiny bow dropped to the ground, and the figure that Mac's arms had invited leapt towards him.

" M-e-e-r——"

The half-formed name died on McGlusky's lips, and the next moment the Black Lily launched herself right between his outstretched arms, and clasped him round the neck. Perhaps it was surprise, perhaps it was the reaction from the danger he had just escaped, but whatever the cause, both McGlusky's big arms locked themselves around the unadorned loveliness of the Black Lily, daughter of the chief of the bushmen. How long he held her thus, Mac never knew; he was wont to aver afterwards that his sense of gratitude made him lose all sense of time. Whatever the cause, he held the almost childlike figure in an embrace that would have tested the rib and lung power of a wrestler. He may have hurt the damsel as he crushed her against his leonine chest, but if he did, she bore her pain with amazing fortitude. One arm still circled his neck; her free hand stroked his face with a kind of passionate abandonment that told a story that was old even before Helen of Troy made history for poets to sing about. Mac only knew that a pair of big black liquid eyes beamed gloriously into his own, and that teeth white as milk were showing between a pair of lips that would have shamed black velvet encrusted by pearls, and those eyes, lips and pearl-white teeth were within an inch of his own granite face, for he held the little figure so close and so high that the soles of her feet were thirty inches from the soil.

"Ye wee wumman, ye wunnerfu' creature. A thocht it was Meeracle tha' had saved me frae the cheetah. A'm a flower born tae bloom oot o' season ma ainsel', but ye, ye wee velvet-skinned black pansy——"

He could not get any further with his outburst of praise and admiration. The deed this childlike figure had performed robbed him of all power of thought and all emotion, except that of gratitude and amazement. Shifting his grip, he took her by the ribs on both sides between outstretched fingers and thumbs, and held her away from him, and it was then that the Scottish Presbyterian, that always lay about an inch below the surface within him, made him notice the scantiness of his preserver's wardrobe. Heedless of the fact that she could not understand a word of what he was saying in the Scottish tongue, he cried out:

"Losh, lassie, ye've washit awa' the dom fule crinoline ma mate painted on ye, an'—an'—ye're wearin' naethin' but half a rabbit skin." Then, as his eyes took in the matchless symmetry of the slim figure: "By the Lord tha' made me," he growled, "ye're black as charcoal dipped in water, but ye're a'thegither lovely."

The damsel could not understand his words, but something primitive in his eyes caused her to flash back at him glances that were as saucy and as enmeshing as those with which Delilah took Samson captive, and her milk-white teeth gleamed again as she laughed the low throaty laugh of the women of Africa.

It was in that moment that a long, low and not unmelodious whistle fell upon the ears of McGlusky. Still holding the girl-woman in the clasp of his hands, as though she were a doll, Mac swung half round, and there in the track he saw the figure of his mate, O'Grady.

On the ugly face of the Irishman a grin that would have had a sunset beaten to a frazzle, roosted as if it had come to stay.

" The top av the avenin' to yez, Misther McGlusky," chirruped the ever-green Irishman. " Ut's a foine avenin' f'r convertin' the hathen, an' seein' ye have got y'r hands full, Oi'll be afther lavin' yez. Ut was only by accident Oi came along this thrail. Y'r horse came into camp an hour ago, an' Oi thought maybe ye had had an accident, an' Oi was makin' a short cut through the jungle to see if Oi could foind y'r remnants. Oi'll be removin' meself from the scenery now, Misther McGlusky, wid apologies f'r havin' come wid the right intentions at the wrong time."

With a still broader grin and the mockery of a bow, Bucky O'Grady raised his tattered hat and was backing away, when McGlusky shamefacedly dropped the Black Lily and turned towards his pal.

" Stan' y'r groon' a meenit, ye wee runt," stormed the big man. " F'r why should ye remove yersel' ? A—A was but thankin' the Black Lily f'r savin' ma life. Look yon'er an' see the arrow i' the throat o' the cheetah. She—this slip o' a wench—saved me. Wha' less could a' dae than gie her ma heartfelt thanks ? Wha' wad ye hae done yersel' unner the circumstances ? Tell me tha', O'Grady."

Again O'Grady grinned, and his merry eyes were jumping in his head.

" Och, phwat would Oi have done, Misther McGlusky ? Oi'm thinkin' Oi'd have done much the same as ye've done yerself, sorr, only Oi wouldn't have stood stammerin' an' yammerin' lies to me mate about ut," and having fired this Parthian shot, the impish little son of the Emerald Isle turned and fled incontinently back the way he had come, and Mac could hear him roaring with laughter as he ran, and some of the things that bubbled through the Scottish lips would have had to be painted if anyone had wished to preserve them, they couldn't be printed.

"The scut," he growled at last. "A'll never hear the last o' this frae him. He'll be makin' a song aboot Black Lillies an' Scotch Thustles, an' singin' it every time he's fu' o' whusky."

With true feminine instinct, the Black Lily had realised that the coming of O'Grady had meant the ending of her idyll, and had moved away with drooping head on slack shoulders, to pick up her bow. Without so much as casting a look in her direction, Mac strode to the spot where the dead cheetah lay, and seizing both hind legs in one hand and forepaws in the other, he slung the heavy carcass across his massive shoulders, and, with a curt command to the girl to follow him, strode off along the trail that O'Grady had taken. For an instant or two the Black Lily stood, an arrow between the fingers of one hand, her bent bow in the other. Mac's cavalier treatment had waked the primitive woman in her savage soul; her shapely rounded bosom rose and fell tumultuously; her teeth were set on edge; her little body stiffened and straightened, and her head went up; then she raised the bow and drew the string taut with the arrow from her quiver fitted in its place. For the second time that evening McGlusky's big feet were hovering upon the border line that divides time from eternity. It only needed the slackening of that bow-string to have sent his spirit to join that of the cheetah in the hunting grounds of the hereafter. The girl had sighted the bow so as to send the little arrow quivering into the man's loins, for that portion of his body was exposed plainly to her view. Just three inches above the hip was the spot she had marked, and such a target her sure hand and eye would never have missed, but even as the evening breeze sang its low whispering song on the vibrant sinew of the bow against which the arrow rested, the feminine in the little savage awoke. This great stalwart leonine white man was hers, according to all the laws of her tribe: she had saved him from certain death. Why had he cast her aside? Why had he turned his broad back upon her? She had felt the human thrill in his mighty arms when first he had gripped her and held her close. That, being a savage, she could understand, but to be thrown aside as her tribesmen threw offal to their dogs, what did it mean? She tried to puzzle out the riddle, even as she stood with bent bow and the blaze of sudden hate in her heart, then the woman in her came to McGlusky's rescue. The magnificence of him, the splendour of his stature, the rough masterfulness of him, touched some chord in her many-chorded nature. The bow grew slack in her hands, the arrow slipped unheeded to the ground; the next moment she had dropped her bow, and, turning her face to the jungle, she seized a thick strand of climbing vine in both her strong slender little hands, and shook it with all her force, stamping one foot passionately; then she let her face droop downwards upon her arms, whilst the solace of tears—hot, angry tears, that come to women, black or brown, white or yellow, the world over—came to her relief, and McGlusky, utterly ignorant [illegible] the human storm he had unleashed, marched [illegible] without so much as a backward glance, until he came to the camp where he found O'Grady nonchalantly preparing a meal.

Dropping the carcass of the cheetah to the ground, Mac, arraying himself in austere dignity, ignored O'Grady, and his grins and chuckles, and set about dressing the now painfully inflamed wound upon his leg. Once only did the Irishman essay some humorous reference to the episode in the jungle, but Mac cut him short, by saying austerely;

"Mon, O'Grady, eef ever ye rasp me wi' y'r tongue aboot the Black Lily an' the benediction A was giein' her f'r savin' ma life, A'll tak' y'r snub nose betwixt ma finger an' thumb, an' A'll no let go o' it till it's long enough f'r ye tae hang a week's washin' on. Noo stop y'r unholy cacklin', an' remember '*Honi soit qui mal y pense.*' A ken weel that no bein' an educatit mon, ye'll no be comprehendin' the French A've gied ye, so tae enlighten y'r ass-headed ignorance, A'll translate it for ye. It means 'Evil be tae him who evil thinks.' Eef ye dae any mair evil thinkin' concernin' me an' the Black Lily dae it inside yersel', an' dinna let it bubble past y'r lips, or, ma certie, eef ye dae, A'll build a nest among the bushes an' put y'r head in it an' sit on it till A hatch oot a brood o' decent thochts. A'm no wrathfu' wi' ye, an' eef y're wise ye'll no raise ma anger."

After that admonition O'Grady had the sense to keep his jibing tongue to himself.

For two or three days McGlusky's wound confined him to the camp, for the calf had swollen nearly to the thickness of his thigh.

"Howly Moike," exclaimed Bucky, when he saw the wounded member about the middle of the next day. "Oi thought ye said, McGlusky, you wid y'r great knowledge av all wild things, that ut was only the fangs av the mate-eatin' animals loike hyanas an' lions an' the cat tribe, that poisoned the flesh they gashed."

"Weel," ejaculated Mac with an upward glance, as he went on bathing his injured member with water almost hot enough to scald the skin. "Wha' o' it?" he added.

"Wild hogs don't ate mate, they ate grass an' wild roots, an' that boar's tusks have poisoned ye, bejabers."

The little fellow was down on his knees, anxiously examining the cruel gash with real anxiety in his eyes as he spoke.

"Iphm," mused Mac. "Ye're a likeable wee mannie, but it wad need a surgical operation tae let sense intae y'r head. It was no the boar's tusk that poisoned me, it was the state o' ma ain bluid. We've been trail-blazin' in the wilds sae long, A've no' had any green vegetables inside masel' until ma bluid has become foul. Eef A could only get a few square meals o' cabbages an' lettuce, or onions an' potatoes, A'd be as richt as a trivet. Y'r trouble, Bucky, is tha' when ye think ye dinna think deep enough. Dae ye mind the big green plants wi' the long broad leaves A pointed oot tae ye when we were lookin' at the silver pool whaur the weaver birds were hangin' their nests frae the boughs an' the kingfishers were killin' snakes ? "

"Shure, Oi remember thim, Mac. Ye said at the toime they were good medicine, but ye didn't say whether ut was medicine f'r birrds or bastes or men, Mac."

"Nae, A didna think it was necessary ; A thocht A was talkin' tae an intelligent animal. Forgie me f'r ma mistake, O'Grady."

"Och, Oi'm not mindin' ye pardner, ridin' me wid spurs. If them laves will do ye any good, Oi'll soon have an armful here. Miracle will guide me to the spot as straight as a crow flies."

"A'm thankin' ye," rumbled McGlusky, "but dinna pick the leaves only, pull the things up by the roots. Ye'll find a long thin vegetable at the end o' each one aboot the colour of a parsnip. Bring twa armfuls an' dinna loiter tae look intae the big beehive on y'r way."

O'Grady's reply was not complimentary in respect to bees or their hives or anything pertaining to them. He soon found Miracle, and hurried off with the bushman, for he was anxious about the state of his comrade's leg, and he knew by past experience that What McGlusky called "a wee matter o' no account" was often a wound that would put the wind up other men. Miracle was an amazingly rapid walker; he just seemed to glide over the ground, but fast as he was, the warm-hearted little Irishman jogging along at his side, kept him at his best pace. When the pair returned, they had vegetables enough to have fed a horse, and at sight of the green food Mac's fever-brightened eyes filled with a gleam of gratitude. Acting under the big fellow's instructions, the Irishman soon had a goodly supply of both roots and leaves on the fire to boil.

"How in the divil's name do ye foind out all these things, Mac? Meself, Oi would have walked through thim plants an' never noticed thim from any others."

"Weel," ejaculated McGlusky, "A were born wi' the bump o' observation i' the front o' ma face, an' yin day A saw an auld sow lead her piglin's tae a bunch o' these green stuff, an' start rootin', an' when they came tae the things like parsnips tha' grow unner the long green leaves, they ate them like boys eatin' apples, an', wee mannie, there is no a wiser animal in a' the world in regard tae food than a pig in its wild state. They'll eat filth when they must, eef ye keep them in a sty, an' even then their flesh is dainty, but let them run wild an' they'll root oot all the nicest things in nature tha' grow i' the wilderness. The French peasants ken this, an' they train their tame pigs tae hunt i' the forests for truffles, an' the truffles fetches a big price i' the markets o' Paris."

"Och, Mac, Oi wish Oi had a head loike y'r own."

"Dinna fash, wee mannie, dinna fash aboot y'r head; there's naethin' wrong wi' y'r head, son, it's wha's inside it tha's no' properly deeveloped. Ye're like a lot mair people i' this world, ye're too dommed non-energetic. Eef ye'd been born dumb, A'd no' be surprisit eef ye'd hae deeveloped intae a thinker. It's the gift o' the gab an' the talent f'r askin' questions that's the curse o' this generation."

O'Grady turned his back in order to hide his grins, for in reality he liked nothing better than one of Mac's caustic lectures, rough-edged as they were.

"The owld divil gives me a lot av information when he's jumpin' on me wid both feet," he murmured to himself, "an' ut's aisier to get schoolin' that way than ut is to work for ut. He's got a talent f'r foindin' out things from nature, an' Oi've a talent f'r foindin' out things from him, so we shplit fair, an' he's no poorer an' Oi'm the richer. He's a gold mine av knowledge, if yez know how to grind ut out av him."

For several days Mac fed almost entirely upon green food, and the effect upon him was magical. It cleared his blood, removed the fever, and his wound healed like the flesh of a babe. Having cured himself, he started out to purify the blood of O'Grady, and gave him so much of it that the Irishman began to curse everything that was green, including shamrock. Being a born reformer, nothing would content Mac, but he must attempt to carry out a blood-purifying crusade amongst the bushmen, until the little men revolted in a body, and threatened to leave him if he interfered further with their meat-eating habits.

"Och, lave them alone," exclaimed O'Grady, when the mutiny was at its height. "Phwy can't yez be content wid reforming them wan sthep at a toime? Ye have got them to wear kilts, both the men an' the wummin, an' that's done two good things. Ut's made them dacent an' ut's thinned off the murtherin' panthers an' leopards an' cheetahs in these mountains. Let thim look afther their insides thimselves; anyway, ye go the wrong way about it, pardner."

"The wrong way?" purred Mac. "A'd be glad," he added stiffly, " eef oot o' the majesty o' y'r intellec' ye'd tell me the richt way."

" Faith, that's aisy. If Oi wanted thim little niggers to ate green stuff instead av mate, Oi wouldn't talk to thim about their health, Oi'd just tell them that the 'green' mate would change the colour av their blood entoirely, an' the blood would change the colour av their skins, an' they'd become white loike you an' meself. If yez could make thim belave that, they'd ate horse-shoes if ye could give thim to thim."

" Ye'd be a leear eef ye told them that."

" Shure Oi would, an' phwat's wan lie more or less in a worrld that's made up mostly av lies? An' afther all, ut ain't phwat ye say, Mac, ut's phwat ye achieve that matters."

" Tha'," growled Mac, glaring with offended dignity at his pardner, " tha' is prostituted pheelosophy."

" Is ut?" chortled the irrepressible Irishman. " Well, ut's the most popular brand Oi've run into in a loifetime av thravel."

As soon as Mac had abandoned his health crusade, he turned his attention to the task of prospecting his platinum claim. At such work as this, both he and O'Grady were masters. With picks and spades, hammers and drills, they wrought lustily, sinking many pot-holes to prove the quality of the claim they had pegged out in all due form. The longer Mac wrought, the more he liked his task, for if there was one thing that appealed to him more than all else on this planet, it was the joy of labour. The little bushmen, who had easily been able to understand the hunting activities of the two white men, could not for their souls' sake realise what purpose the pair had in view in hewing holes out of rock which cost such strenuous labour. They were intensely interested when the trail-blazers having drilled holes in the lode, inserted dynamite and blew great gaps in the stubborn material they were working upon, but when McGlusky tried to press them into his service to haul and hoist the big fragments that the dynamite had shaken free, their interest in the whole proceeding evaporated, and they informed him that they were hunters, not Kaffir toilers. In vain the big fellow threatened and cajoled. When he menaced them with his big fists, they stood their ground, like the spunky little warriors they were, and fitted arrows to their bows; when he tried to cajole them, they squatted on their hams and grinned at him, or sprawled on the shady side of adjacent boulders and went to sleep.

" They're hopeless," grumbled Mac. " The laziness is bred i' the bone o' them. They were a great people yince, a nation, an' A'm thinkin' some dom black politeecian among them, who wanted tae win their votes in bygone times, invented the dole, an' seeved it up tae them until they learnt tae hate honest work, an' f'r generation after generation the curse o' the dole has followed them, until they hae become a weak an' a scattered people. Stronger an' mair industrious black nations hae driven these bushmen awa' frae the fat lands that yince were theirs, until they became wha' they are to-day, a handfu' o' Ishmaelites wi' nae lands o' their ain, nae country, an' naethin' tae live for, but huntin' an' laziness an' the fillin' o' their bellies, an'," he added gloomily, " A ken weel a white nation tha's beginnin' tae walk on the same trail. It's awfu', Bucky O'Grady, ma mon; a nation black or white, tha' brings its boys up tae expec' somethin' f'r naethin' as a richt is goin' tae breed naethin' but bummers an' bounders in the end."

CHAPTER X

THE WHEEL OF FORTUNE

ONE night whilst the two trail-blazers were resting at their bivouac after a hard day's work, Miracle came and joined them. As a rule when he dropped in upon them of an evening, the little hunter squatted himself down upon his hams, and either watched the white men performing any task they might have in hand, or else he engaged McGlusky in conversation, for the big fellow was now very proficient in the use of the bushmen's tongue. On this occasion, however, he was full of suppressed excitement, a fact which Mac was not slow to notice.

"Wha's wrong wi' the little ink-spot, A wunner?" and O'Grady, accepting the query as being addressed to himself, answered:

"Better ask him, Mac. P'raps he's heard av somethin' big in the way ov movin' herds av game comin' across the plains down near the bushmen's main encampment. Oi'm hopin' he has, f'r Oi'm about fed up wid hard minin' worrk for a spell, McGlusky, an' Oi'd welcome a little divarsion in the way av a big hunt."

Mac sniffed contemptuously.

"Ye've nae continuity o' purpose, O'Grady, an' tha's been the curse o' y'r life. Ye won't stick tae yin thing long enough tae mak' a success o' it. Ye remind me o' a butterfly, flittin' frae flower tae flower."

The Irishman grinned wholeheartedly at this simile; he had seen his own reflection that evening in the waters of a placid pool, and he did not think there was much of the butterfly breed about himself.

Miracle had been fidgetting about whilst the two white men were colloguing, so Mac, who was grumpy at the mere thought of having mining work interfered with, demanded in the bushmen's tongue to know the cause of his excitement, and Miracle, nothing loath, unburdened himself of his news budget, and when once he started talking his tongue rattled ahead, as if he had struck the secret of perpetual motion. As he talked, the little man made eloquent gestures with both hands, at the same time rolling his eyes until often little else but the whites of them were showing. O'Grady, who could only catch a word here and there of the speech, at first went on cleaning his hunting gear, which he had been engaged upon when Miracle had arrived, but when he noted with what fixed attention McGlusky was following their black ally's vivid eloquence, he ceased his work, and watched the granite face of his partner, for Mac was craning forward, soaking in every word that fell from the black lips, and every now and again shooting in a remark or a query on his own account. That the news the bushmen had brought was of paramount importance, the Irishman's quick wit soon informed him. At first an expression of incredulity had settled on the Scottish Australian countenance, this in turn gave place to a look of blank astonishment, and as the black man's story unfolded itself, amazement followed by black anger were each in turn depicted on Mac's countenance. When Miracle had concluded his recital, he held out his hand for the present he usually got when he had done anything worthy of a reward. Without a moment's hesitation McGlusky tossed him a full plug of tobacco, an exhibition of extravagant generosity which made O'Grady purse his lips up and whistle, for as a general rule McGlusky's reward took the shape of a couple of pipefuls of the precious weed.

"Phwat's he told yez, Mac, that ye are showerin' gifts on him fit f'r black princes?"

There was a note of banter in the Irishman's voice as he threw out his query, but the imp of mischief that was ingrained in O'Grady instantly took its departure when Mac, wheeling upon him, grated out:

"Eef wha' Meeracle tells me is true—an' A'll stake ma immortal soul it is, f'r he couldna hae invented it—then we've a' the trouble on oor han's, Bucky, tha' we'll be needin', an' a bit ower tae lend tae some ither pilgrim who's fond o' treebulation."

The rasping note in the big fellow's voice shook all the levity out of the little man.

"Spit out the trouble, Mac, an' let me sample ut."

In quick terse sentences Mac went to the root of the matter.

"Yin o' the bushmen had been oot i' the desert which you an' me crossed before we reached this land o' plenty, an' he came back hot foot to the tribe's main camp wi' a story o' a big bunch o' white hunters makin' their way here. He told the chief, who, as ye ken, is Meeracle's faither, o' wha' he had seen, an' the auld mon sent him on tae us as fast as feet wad carry him, an' A'm richt glad he did, Bucky O'Grady, f'r eef the pairty noo nearly across the desert is no' led by Von Videlheim, ca' me a grasshopper."

"Phwat makes ye think so, Mac? Shure ut may be only a party av dacent Boer hunters, or maybe a company av prospectors. Phwat makes ye jump to the idea that they're inimies?"

"Because the hunter-scout described the leader o' this pairty in a word picture, an' it's Von Videlheim tae the life. Half a head taller than ma ainsel', wi' a beard like silken sunshine, big blue eyes bright as the stars an' hard as the flints i' the desert, a mon who made a' the ithers wi' him look like half-grown boys on accoont o' the size o' him. Tha's Von Videlheim tae the life. They've nae ither like him in a' Africa, an' few tae compare wi' him f'r looks an' shape an' strength an' courage in a' the worl'. The deil's buckie must hae gone back frae the poisoned pond an' gathered a proper outfit tae come in pursuit o' us. O' a' the men A've ever heard o', Von Videlheim is the maist vindictive an' pitiless an' tireless. A'll wager he's picked up a choice set o' blackguards, men o' his ain kidney, an' eef they've come this far on oor trail, Bucky O'Grady, they'll no leave it until they get us or we get them. It will be yin o' those twa things, f'r by the God o' ma faithers, he an' his bluid-hoonds are no gaun tae get ma platinum mine as they got ma diamon' claim. A'm no bluid-thirsty, as ye ken weel, but before he shall hae ma hard won spoils, A'll seat him on the end o' an assegai, an' push him doon on it until he can pick his back teeth wi' the point."

"By the blessed saints, Oi can understand how ye feel about ut, Mac, but phwat Oi can't understand is phwy he should have gone to all the trouble and expense to hunt f'r us just f'r the bit av a bad turn we did him."

"A'm thinkin' there's anither reason, O'Grady. When we struck oot f'r this country, travellin' the way we did, we did it because we were desperate men, hard set tae fin' a new country wi' new prospects. It was a' new tae us, we were blazin' a trail, but it wouldna' look like tha' tae a mon wi' a mind like Von Videlheim's. If they followed us tae the edge o' the desert—an' A'm no dootin' noo tha' they did—he must hae formed the impression that we knew whaur we were goin', an' tha' we knew o' treasure somewhere on this side o' the desert."

"Divil a bit did we know, Mac."

"No, O'Grady, we did not; we just went whaur the winds o' chance blew us, but Von Videlheim didn't think sae. He kens me weel; A've a reputation as a prospector o' precious metals second tae none, an' the spawn o' Satan argues wi' his ain soul after this fashion; McGlusky has found somethin' worth riskin' life an' limb for. He's foond it too in a country where the laws dae not run, an' wha' he's foond A'll steal frae him, an' tha's wha' he's here tae dae the noo, Bucky O'Grady, an' no' tae steal only, but tae kill. No' f'r naethin' did the Zulus ca' him the white wolf, but——" Here McGlusky rose, lifting his great figure to its full height and, throwing up his head like a bull bison snuffing the air that had been tainted by an enemy, he growled: "F'r many a long year A've wished tae come tae grups wi' tha' mon." He paused, then looking upward to the blue-black skies whilst a bland and almost child-like smile grew round his mouth, he exclaimed: "A'm theenkin' the God o' ma faithers has sent him tae me, an' eef A dinna gie him a welcome worthy o' Jamie McGlusky, ye may scratch me inside oot, O'Grady, an' turn me intae a beehive. Noo we'll gang aloong wi' Meeracle an' get haud o' th' scout-hunter o' his, an' A'll cross-question him in his ain tongue an' learn f'r sure eef it is Von Videlheim, an' hoo many men he has wi' him. When A've gathered the information, we'll just break camp an' mak' off oot o' the moontains tae the headquarters o' the bushman tribe."

"Howld on there, Mac. Wouldn't ut be better to let Von Videlheim and his blackguards come seekin' us in the mountains? If he gets as far as the main camp av the bushmen, he's sure to learn enough av our whereabouts to follow us wid all his men, an' thin, Mac, we'll turn natural history to good account."

McGlusky looked at the little man with an expression of puzzlement.

"Wha' natural heestory are ye dreamin' o', wee the mornin' to yez all. Och, ye do look elegant wid y'r hands an' faces all turned up to the sky. Phwat is ut ye are doin', are ye prayin' f'r rain ? "

All the time he was jibing at the prisoners, he was busy collecting their armament. When he had deposited the last rifle and revolver at the feet of McGlusky, he stopped, and pointing to Mombaku, who was standing near Von Videlheim, he gazed with a sort of wonderment in his face at the yellow-skinned Hottentot who glowered at him with eyes that looked almost red through the slits in the dirty yellow lids.

" Och, Von Videlheim, tell me, phwat is ut ye've got wid yez ? Is ut y'r own familiar divil, or is ut a cross betwane a ' missin' link ' an' a Chinese idol ? Phwatever ut is, ut's the ugliest divil Oi've ever seen. Is ut a new kind av hairless ape without a tail ? "

Von Videlheim permitted his peculiarly heavy lidded eyes to droop downwards, and an expression of haughty contempt spread over his countenance.

" Get back to your kennel in Dublin," he said contemptuously, " you rat of the slums. This is Mombaku, nearly the last, if not the last of the Hottentot wizards and sorcerers. He carries more brains between his toes than your father and mother gave to you."

When Von Videlheim, carried away by his passion, mentioned the name Mombaku, Miracle and many of his little warriors instantly turned their bows full upon the Hottentot, and low but savage cries broke from their lips, whilst the name of Mombaku ran from lip to lip. Almost instantly Von Videlheim saw the error he had made, and though in nearly everything that marked his stormy life he had been pitiless, he now showed that there was at least one human streak in his nature.

" Tell your black dogs, McGlusky, I will give half the trade goods in our packs for the Hottentot's life and liberty. All he will ask will be one hour's start in the desert; then let your bushmen catch him if they can."

Swiftly McGlusky translated this speech to Miracle and his men, but a low, fierce, hoarse negative came from every bushman's lips.

"Mombaku, the sorcerer, the man who can kill with spells, the man who walks with devils. No—no—no. Whoever lives, he dies," and before either Von Videlheim or McGlusky could utter either promise or protest, a dozen bows twanged, and every arrow was buried in the Hottentot's body.

For a moment or two the stricken man stood swaying from right to left, then slowly he sank down upon his hams, buried his hideous wrinkled face between his knees, and without so much as a shudder or a moan, his spirit passed to its place.

It was then that McGlusky laid his rifle down and, stepping out in front of Von Videlheim, he said in quiet, concentrated tones:

"Mon, ye ca'd me a cooard, an' said A was feared tae face ye, an' A ca'd ye a leear, an' A'm here tae prove ma words. Strip tae y'r waist, an' A'll meet ye naked mon tae mon. Eef ye win, ye gang free; eef A win A'll bury ye here unner six feet o' desert sand, an' the poisoned spinifex shall grow ower y'r poisonous body."

A tigerish light leapt into the blue eyes of the buccaneer.

"If I win, I go free? What guarantee have I that this bargain will be kept if I win?"

Up went McGlusky's head.

"Ye've the word o' Jamie McGlusky. A've laid ma commands on Bucky, ma mate, an' on Meeracle an' his tribesmen."

Swiftly the two men stripped themselves naked to the hips, then faced each other like two bulls, and it was evident from the moment their eyes met that this was not to be a battle of blows, it was to be a rending of flesh and the cracking of bones, for there was death in both pairs of eyes. Of all the savages in that throng they were the most savage. As McGlusky advanced, with body slightly bent and head thrust forward, he grated through his teeth :

" O' a' the crimes that stain y'r dirty soul, A'll pay ye f'r the worst the day—the ruin o' the bonnie wee bit lassie ye lured intae a false marriage in Australia, and then broke an' killed her. Tha's tae be avengit. Noo measure yersel' wi' a mon."

As two bulls meet on a hillside, the giants crashed together and gripped each other's flesh with big gnarled hands that had in them the power of triple steel. Chin to chin, chest to chest, eye to eye, they stood, swaying in the deadly grapple. Once McGlusky was borne to his knees with his head forced backward and his backbone bent inwards. The agony he must have suffered in those moments would have sundered body and soul in a lesser man. Froth and blood trickled from the corners of his lips, and his eyes rolled upward, until little but the whites of them could be seen, but no cry, no moan came from his lips. Slowly, inch by inch, his knees were raised from the ground, for in spite of his agony he had never loosed his hold upon his foeman's body, his clenched fingers were still locked over Von Videlheim's spine. In that moment his gods must have come to him, just when death and a broken spine were almost upon him. Inch by inch his bent knees straightened, and then he put forth the last ounce of all the power and magnetism and courage that were in him, and now Von Videlheim's head went backwards, his spine bent inwards, his mouth flew open, but no cry for quarter came through the parted lips. A dull film spread over the wonderful steel-blue eyes that had looked unshrinkingly upon so much wickedness; sweat burst like beads of dew on forest trees from the tormented faces and bodies of the giants; no sound was heard but their heavy panting breath. Their enormous muscles swelled until the wonder was they did not burst the skin, then out on the stillness rose a sharp, cracking sound, and Von Videlheim's body lay an inert mass of quivering, nerveless flesh, in McGlusky's arms. The primitive stone-age struggle was over. Three hours later McGlusky fulfilled his promise to the dead giant, and buried him under six feet of sand, and planted spinifex above him.

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When the burial was over, McGlusky lined his prisoners up and walked slowly along their ranks, looking keenly into each face.

" A want tae photograph every yin o' ye on the tablets o' ma memory. Ye cam' here at the biddin' o' an evil mon tae seek the life o' a peaceful mon unner cover o' justice. A wad hae been weel wi'in ma richts accordin' tae wilderness law, eef A had planted every yin o' ye here alongside y'r leader."

" You're wrong, *Mister* McGlusky."

It was the voice of Van Troop that rang out from the end of the line of captives.

" Who says A'm wrong ? " retorted McGlusky, striding down to his interrupter.

" I do," calmly responded the Boer. " I have neither part nor lot with these men, nor did I seek your life or your property."

Then in quiet but convincing tones the Boer told how he had quite by accident or the will of fate joined up with Von Videlheim's party.

" Wha' may y'r name be, an' whaur dae ye hail frae ? "

"My name is Van Troop, and——"

"No' Van Troop o' Mafeking?" interrupted McGlusky eagerly.

"Yes, Mafeking is my home, and was my father's and his father's before him."

"A ken the name weel, though A never met ye. Did ye ever foregather wi' a mon named Lindaque?"

The Boer smiled.

"Yes," he responded, "and he told me much of you. Lindaque is my cousin on my mother's side."

"Noo," exclaimed McGlusky, stretching out his hand, "A ken ye're a true mon an' nae leear, an' A'm glad o' it. Step oot o' the ranks o' this scum, Mr. Van Troop. Ye're welcome tae bide by me an' ma mate, an' A'm thinkin' ye'll be safer tae dae it till these blasties are weel on their way back ower the spinifex desert. Are the twa Zulus y'r men?"

"Yes, and good men too, McGlusky."

"Well, tak' them an' a' y'r ootfit, an' gang wi' Bucky O'Grady while A gie these blasties a taste o' desert law."

An hour later the posse that had followed Von Videlheim were sitting in their saddles with their horses' heads turned on the back trail, and McGlusky stood behind them.

"A've gied ye food enough oot o' y'r ain rations tae carry ye back tae the place ye cam' frae," growled Mac. "All y'r trade goods are confiscated tae the present Government o' this place, which is but the rightfu' usage o' war, an'," he added unctuously, "at the present moment A—Jamie McGlusky—am the sole an' ainly government o' these pairts. Y'r trade goods will come in michty handy f'r ma army." With a wave of his arm he indicated Miracle and his little black bowmen. "A've gied ye twa rifles an' a dozen cartridges between the lot o' ye. A'm nae sic a fule as tae trus' ye wi' mair. Noo ride f'r it, an' follow y'r ain tracks back frae water hole tae water hole, an' dinna loiter on the way, or maybe mair than yin o' ye will leave y'r bones i' the desert. Fare ye weel, an' a pleasant voyage hame, ye scum an' sweepin's o' the four corners o' a wicked worl'. Oot an' awa'," he shouted, "while ma heart is brimmin' ower wi' the milk o' human kindness. Eef ye stay longer, ye may rouse ma anger," and as if to accelerate their movements, Miracle and his men, at a signal from McGlusky, sent a flight of arrows whirring wickedly over the horsemen's heads, and as the defeated rapscallions rode dejectedly away in one direction, McGlusky with Bucky O'Grady, Van Troop and Miracle and his men, moved back towards the platinum country.

A few days later McGlusky, who had formed a very high estimate of his Boer guest's character, took the man from Mafeking into the mountains, and disclosed to him the whereabouts of his mine. After they had carefully inspected the property, Mac, leaning on his pick, demanded:

"Weel, wha' dae ye think o' it?"

The Boer, who had spent many years as a mining investor, at which business he had amassed a fortune, expressed his views frankly.

"It's a valuable find, McGlusky, but I am afraid it will not develop into anything more than a 'surface show.' Still, there is enough platinum on the surface to win for you and your mate a fortune large enough to satisfy the wants of any two reasonable men. My advice to you is sell out. You haven't got the capital to put machinery in and hire the men to develop such a property as this so far away from civilisation. If you go to any of the big centres with it, carrying your specimens, and try to float a company to work your property, you will run the risk of being swindled out of your hard won wealth, but whilst you are floating your company, other prospectors may get upon your trail and come here, and in the end you may find yourself tied up with law suits brought by dishonest men."

"Wha' mak's ye think it will turn oot tae be ainly a 'surface show,' Van Troop?"

"Well," replied the Boer, "I was a mining inspector for ten years before I became a mining investor, and I know my business. At the north end of your claim there is a ravine running right across the course of your lode. I went down there and examined it, but found no trace of platinum more than a few feet from the surface; below that the rock was barren, and it was very much the same at the south end. However, the claim belongs to you and your mate. If you care to gamble on it, I'll help you all I can to form a company upon a reasonable basis, but I warn you the news of your find is sure to leak out before we can get the company going, and I'm afraid you will strike trouble, and perhaps have your interests tied up in the Law Courts for many years, and it takes money to fight law cases, McGlusky, big money."

As McGlusky stood pondering over this matter, Bucky O'Grady, who had been standing a few yards away and had overheard the whole of the conversation, stole to the big fellow's side, and plucking at his shirt sleeve at the elbow, he whispered imploringly with an eloquent upward glance.

"Sell ut, Mac darlint. We've been livin' in the land av promise, an' feedin' on hope an' expectation until the belly of me fair aches to get me two hands on the fruits av wan rale success. Sell ut, Mac, an' come wid me to Ireland, an' let's buy a brewery, an' we'll have lashin's av fun."

"A'm no' sae sure ye're no' richt, wee mannie.

Like yersel', A'm gey weary o' huntin' the fortune tha's tae come tae us to-morrow. There's been a deil o' a lot o' 'to-morrows' tha' never dawned i' the life o' Jamie McGlusky. A'll sell, an' we'll divide fair fifty-fifty, eef Van Troop will buy, but O'Grady, A won't come wi' ye tae start a brewery. Eef we baith got druthy at the same time, we'd mop up maist o' the profits between us, but A'm weary o' adventure. Eef Van Troop buys, A'll gang tae Britain wi' ye, an' buy a wee bit estate, an' settle doon disguised as a country gentleman. A'm nae sae auld tha' A canna tak' up sport."

"Bedad, an' that's a grand idea. Ye would bate the world to a frazzle, Mac, at anythin' that ye set y'r heart on that needed brains an' strength an'—an' guts. Phwat line av sport did yez have in y'r moind, Mac?"

"Weel, bein' Scotch, A think A'd start oot first on golf. It made me weary the last time A was passin' through Britain tae read in the papers o' a Yankee buckie named Hogen who was dustin' the tails o' a' the Britishers, an' carryin' awa' their siller an' their trophies. A've never played golf, but eef A couldna' hit a wee sma' ball like the yin they play wi' halfway frae Edinburgh tae London, A'd eat the domn thing wi'oot pickles. Ye ken A'd mak' ma ain clubs, an' any mon who couldna' learn tha' game frae soup tae nuts in three months, canna be anythin' mair than a village eediot. Ye just poke it up on a bit of sand an' biff it tae blazes, an' then they put y'r pictures i' the paper, an' eef ye don't hae a pedigree, any newspaper buckie will write ye yin beginnin' wi' William the Conqueror at the battle o' Agincourt, an' leadin' richt doon tae the day ye win the championship. The pedigree will cost ye a wee bit o' siller, but mon, it's worth it."

So it came to pass that Van Troop, McGlusky and

O'Grady crossed the spinifex desert, led by Miracle and escorted by a score of his little bowmen and a posse of their women, and when it came to the final parting of the ways between the white man and the black, Mac distributed largesse with a generous hand, giving to them all the trade goods he had looted from Von Videlheim's outfit. For the Black Lily he had made up a gorgeous parcel of bright beads, red blankets and several mirrors made and framed in Birmingham, the frames being warranted "Pure Brummagem silver." It was a gorgeous moonlight night when this parting took place. The moon rode high in a blue-black sky, but even its golden glory was eclipsed by the massed myriads of twinkling silver stars that made the heavens blaze. Mac and the Black Lily stood a bit apart under the outspreading branches of a mimosa tree in full bloom. The eyes the Lily turned up to him almost shamed the scintillating stars in the skies above them. He placed the gorgeous presents close to the little feet, and wished the slender, childish-looking denizen of the wilds farewell. Just as he was turning from her the Lily, for a moment losing the stoical self-control with which she had hitherto steeled herself, sprang straight into his arms, clinging to him as ivy clings to a tall pine. For a moment he held her close, murmuring to the night winds as he did so:

"The east an' the west, they canna' meet; the black an' the white, they mauna mate, but losh, lassie, A've met many a wumman wi' a whiter skin an' a blacker heart than yer ain wee sel'."

Gently the strong man put the nearly nude figure from him, and growling inarticulate sounds in his throat, strode away and as he swung to saddle and rode away with Van Troop, the purchaser of the platinum mine, and O'Grady, his pal; he did not see the lissom girlish figure of the Black Lily as the daughter of the wilderness knelt with her face buried in the crimson blankets which held McGlusky's farewell gifts.

FINIS.